Convents and conspiracies: a study of convent narratives in the United States, 1850-1870

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Edinburgh
2009

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work carried out is my own and has not been submitted for any other degree or other professional qualification.

Catherine McGowan 5 May 2009

Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for the unstinting help I have received since 2002 when I embarked on this project.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance I have received from the British Association for American Studies. The Peter Parish Award enabled me to travel to the United States and spend three weeks carrying out research in Washington D.C., New York and Boston.

I have visited numerous libraries during the course of this study and have received enthusiastic assistance in all of them. I am especially grateful to the staff of the Edinburgh University Library and the National Library of Scotland for their invaluable and sustained help.

I would like to thank the many people I have met through the Department of History at the University of Edinburgh since I first joined the department as an undergraduate who have given me helpful comments and encouragement.

I am forever grateful to my supervisors, Professor Frank Cogliano and Owen Dudley Edwards, whose enthusiasm, wisdom and patience made this experience tremendously rewarding, both academically and personally.

My various employers throughout this experience (TSO Scotland; The Royal Lyceum Theatre Company; Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland; National Museums Scotland; and Alzheimer Scotland) have been extremely supportive and I would like to thank them for their understanding.

Many friends helped to keep me going throughout researching and writing this thesis and my sister, Margaret, assisted in many ways, not least by invaluable proof reading. My biggest debt though is to Michael Thomas, whose unfailing love and support made this project possible.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to Mum and Dad, with love and thanks.

Abstract

In recent years, historians studying the United States in the mid-nineteenth century have made increasing use of popular writings to identify attitudes and beliefs. One genre of writing which has been largely overlooked by scholars of history is the convent narrative. These texts criticized convents and claimed that American nuns suffered imprisonment and abuse. Numerous examples of this genre, including both avowedly fictional novels and purported real-life autobiographies, were published in the United States between 1850 and 1870. Detailed study of these works uncovers a rich seam of evidence of popular attitudes to a range of political, religious and social forces, including republicanism, Catholicism, immigration, urbanization, industrialization, slavery and the role of women. This study analyzes and compares the themes, ideologies and techniques found in these texts. It will relate these to their wider context, and will examine the role the texts played in transmitting and reinforcing the beliefs and opinions of their authors. Close study of the narratives reveals that their authors were primarily concerned, not with the religious implications of convents and Catholicism (although these did alarm these authors), but, first and foremost, with the safety and stability of the American republic. The creators of convent narratives believed that the republic was under siege from anti-republican forces working to undermine the American way of life on a number of different fronts. These concerns are manifested repeatedly in the convent narratives. Where previously this genre has been overlooked by historians, except as a straightforward manifestation of lurid and sensationalistic anti-Catholic nativism, this study analyzes the deeper ideals and ideologies which these documents reveal, and establishes a basis for further exploration,

both of the convent narrative genre in itself and of popular and populist literature in general.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> Now, a slave for life, I could have no will of my own, I must go at bidding, and come at command. This, I am well aware, may seem to some extravagant language; but I use the right word. I was, literally, a slave; and of all kinds of slavery, that which exists in a convent is the worst. I say, THE WORST, because the story of wrong and outrage which occasionally finds its way to the public ear is not generally believed.[1]

Life in the Grey Nunnery of Montreal (1857), attributed to Sarah Richardson and subtitled 'an authentic narrative of the horrors, mysteries, and cruelties of convent life' is one of several exposés of forced incarceration and abuse in convents published in the United States between 1850 and 1870.[2] Historians have paid little attention to these texts, even though they are fascinating documents which offer extremely valuable insights into the religious, sectional, economic and political divisions which existed in the United States in this period. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ideologies of the people who created these texts and to relate the narratives to the wider context in which they were written. It will be argued that far from merely expressing anti-Catholic bigotry, these texts were part of a nation-wide project – a movement to defend the (still new) republic from perceived threats; threats which were religious, political, social, economic and cultural. The convent narrative formed part of a continuum of 'revolutionary' activity which had assumed a (paradoxically) defensive and even reactionary form by 1850.

The convent narrative genre first 'flowered' in the United States in the 1830s, when several exposés were published. However, this thesis will focus on those

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[1] Sarah Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (Boston: Damrell & Moore, 1857), 25-26. N.B. extracts from primary sources are given with their original spelling throughout. Words such as labour/labor were spelled in varying ways in the United States in this period.

[2] For the convenience of the reader, the dates of works cited will be given in the body of the text throughout the thesis.

published between 1850 and 1870. This is because the many narratives published in this period have received hardly any scholarly attention. Such work as has been done on the convent narratives tended to focus on the earlier texts while the later works have received hardly any scholarly attention. While some narratives were written after 1870, there were fewer of them. In addition, the social, economic and political climate changed rapidly after this date. While 1850-1870 also saw many changes, most significantly those associated with the Civil War, in the context of the convent narrative it represents an identifiable period of time which provides a useful demarcation in chronology and a manageable amount of material. For this reason, this period has been chosen as the focus of this thesis.

The Catholic church established a number of convents in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. They were principally educational establishments. Critics claimed that they cultivated well-off middle-class Protestant parents, both for their money and for the chance of making converts, while excluding poor Catholic children. This was in the context of a bitter dispute over public funding for Catholic schools (see below, 192-196, 228). While the schools at the centre of this controversy were different in nature from the convents, being parochial elementary schools rather than ladies' seminaries, which the convents resembled, the convents were still associated with the arguments against Catholic education. Opponents of monasticism believed that American convents subverted the republic by encouraging anti-republican Catholicism, by reinforcing class and social divisions and hierarchies, and by perpetuating the perceived ignorance and anti-republican values of Catholic immigrants and their children. These views were prominent in the convent narratives.

The convent narrative was a genre with recognizable forms, styles and conventions. The subject of the typical convent narrative is a young woman who becomes a nun, experiences imprisonment in a convent, and suffers physical, emotional and sometimes sexual abuse. Sometimes the nun is a Protestant who converts to Catholicism as a result of intrigue by nuns and priests, while in other examples the nun has been indoctrinated from birth. In either case, she always re-enters the Protestant fold, perhaps with the encouragement of another nun, or through study of the Bible, or even by a miraculous conversion experience. The story concludes either happily with her escape or unhappily with her death at the hands of her captors.

There does not appear to have been a comparable 'monastery narrative' genre in this period. There were few monks in the United States at this time. Anti-Catholic writings did refer to monasteries in Europe and Canada, but no reference to American monasteries has been found in any of the anti-Catholic literature surveyed. This suggests that anti-convent activists did not view monasteries as threatening, presumably on the grounds that they were very rare in comparison to convents. Equally importantly, it suggests that the writers of these texts were particularly concerned with women and with their place in society, and found the spectre of female monasticism especially alarming.

The narratives might be presented as autobiography or fiction, but were usually written either in the first person using the voice of the nun herself or by a third party who recounts the nun's tale. The authorship of these texts is often questionable. Many authors of convent narratives wrote anonymously or published under a pseudonym. As an example, one of the earliest and most notorious convent narratives, Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery (New York: Howe and Bates, 1836), was, on

publication, attributed to Maria Monk, a young woman who claimed to have escaped from a Montreal convent. In fact, the book seems to have been a collaborative exercise involving Monk and several clergymen, according to testimony given during a lawsuit over the profits of the book.[3] Another example is Six Months in a Convent (Boston: Russell, Odiorne and Metcalf, 1835) by Rebecca Reed. The book appears to have passed through the hands of Reed's minister and then a 'committee of publication' (including the politician Benjamin Hallett; see below, 261) on the way to the printing press.[4] Josephine Bunkley, the supposed author of Miss Bunkley's Book: The Testimony of an Escaped Novice (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), later repudiated the work.[5] It seems possible, even likely, that other, similar works, which are less well-documented, originated in similar circumstances. The authorship and provenance of the convent narratives will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

This study aims to analyze the convent narratives in the light of David Brion Davis' and Richard Hofstadter's theories of counter-subversion and the 'paranoid style in American politics.' David Brion Davis argued in 1960 that, in nineteenth-century America, 'fear of internal subversion was channeled into a number of powerful counter movements which attracted wide public support.' He suggested that 'by focusing his attention on the imaginary threat of a secret conspiracy, [participants in counter movements] found an outlet for many irrational impulses, yet professed [their] loyalty to the ideals of equal rights and government by law.'[6] Hofstadter's subsequent 1964 essay argued further that American politics had been marked by 'heated exaggeration,

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[3] See Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), 99-108; Nancy Lusignan Schultz, 'Introduction', Veil of Fear: Nineteenth Century Convent Tales by Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk (West Lafayette, Indiana, NotaBell Books, Purdue University Press, 1999), xv-xix.

[4] See Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 90-91; Schultz, 'Introduction', Veil of Fear, xi-xv.

[5] See T.J.C. Williams and Folger McKinsey, History of Frederick County, Maryland (Frederick: L.R. Titsworth & Co., 1910), I, 294-295.

[6] David Brion Davis, 'Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature', in Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 47:2 (September, 1960), 205, 224.

suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy' which was best denoted as 'paranoid.' His study described the paranoid reaction to Illuminism, Freemasonry and Jesuits, and identified similar trends of thought which continued in American politics into the 1960s. Bernard Bailyn, in The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (1967), also identified a belief in conspiracy as an important motivation for the Revolution, as well as noting similar beliefs among anti-republicans.[7] Hofstadter describes anti-Catholic depictions of wicked Catholic priests, who are portrayed as 'perfect model[s] of malice…sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving.' This study will demonstrate that the convent narratives viewed their enemies in near-identical terms.[8]

This study contributes a new dimension to this theory by linking anxieties over womanhood to anxieties over the safety of the republic. The convent narratives constitute a powerful body of evidence for such anxieties and represent a fascinating conjunction of gender politics, republican paranoia, religious propaganda and reaction to rapid economic and social change. A close reading of the convent narratives demonstrates the importance for their authors and, by implication, their readers of gender politics to all these facets of American life. There is a discernible sense in these texts that the republic is at risk and they manifest this strongly in anxiety over the status and position of women in society.

'Republicanism' as a historiographical concept is of relevance to the discussion of 'the paranoid mindset' because according to Hofstadter's theory such a mindset is closely associated with the fear the American republic is in danger. Daniel T. Rogers' 1992 essay 'Republicanism: the Career of a Concept' outlines the history of the idea of

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[7] Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), ix.

[8] Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966 [1965]), 3, 29, 31-32.

'republicanism' and provides a helpful insight into the arguments that historians have used to criticize it. Rogers calls 'the process by which republicanism burst onto the scene' a 'conceptual transformation.' In essence, for Rogers, 'republicanism' meant that the Revolution was 'empowered by the ideas of "commonwealth" or "country" Englishmen.' In short 'republicanism' involved the promotion of these English thinkers to the front rank of the influences on the Revolution.[9]

Rogers describes the ways in which the concept of 'republicanism' took on a life of its own, as it were. In his interpretation, as time went on, 'republicanism' was 'used' in inappropriate ways by historians to reach conclusions not justified by its evidential base because they found it supported their historical and ideological agendas. He argues that the concept appealed to historians because it was helpful in organizing the complex events of American history within an identifiable ideological framework that offered a politically positive view of the creation of the United States. He writes that 'the history of the conviction that the concept of republicanism could unlock the basic riddles of American politics and political culture is the history of a conjunction of multiple, sometimes contradictory needs.' For Rogers, 'republicanism' 'ran the danger of explaining everything.'[10] The theories of Hofstadter, Brion Davis and Bailyn relating to conspiratorial and paranoid mindsets have been criticized as relying too heavily on republicanism as a primary source of anxieties manifesting in paranoia.

As an example of an alternative interpretation of the relation of anxieties to republicanism, Carol Lasser believes that growing uncertainties about the role of women after 1840 'deflected into broader concerns about subversive threats to American liberty', i.e. that social fears gave birth to political fears. This contradicts this

[9] Daniel T. Rogers, 'Republicanism: the Career of a Concept' in Journal of American History 79:1 (Jun., 1992), 11-38, 11, 17.
[10] Rogers, 'Republicanism: the Career of a Concept', 37, 12, 38.

study's contention that, on the contrary, concerns for American liberty were manifested in anxiety over gender roles. However, it is not clear how Lasser has reached this conclusion. She writes that 'In all these movements, erotic content [in anti-Catholic, anti-Mormon and anti-slavery literature] seems to suggest' such a deflection. She does not explain, though, why this should be so.[11] By contrast, the theory that gender anxieties were, in part, an expression of republican and political 'paranoia' can be borne out by the evidence in the texts, as will be shown throughout this thesis. In addition, fears for the republic appear to have been manifested well before 1840.

While it is instructive to bear these criticisms and alternative interpretations in mind, they do not undermine the thesis that the convent narratives promoted republican values and expressed fears that Catholicism was attempting to subvert them, specifically using female monasticism. The convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s demonstrate this, both in explicit statements of intent by authors and in other non-explicit but equally important ways. 'Republicanism' has taken on a historiographic meaning which is not necessarily helpful to the understanding of this topic and which says more about historians and their ideological preoccupations than about the motivations and beliefs of the authors under discussion here. This thesis draws its conclusions from the evidence in the texts. In the process of researching and writing this thesis, the belief that the convent narratives exhibited Hofstadter's 'paranoid mindset' grew from perusing the consistent evidence to this effect, rather than informing the choice of subject or directing the progress of the research. However it is very important to remember that political considerations always co-existed with a complex of other motivations and beliefs. As Rogers states,

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[11] Carol Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric', Journal of the Early Republic 28 (Spring 2008), 96.

> This investing of the revolutionary mind in the texts of a handful of English publicists was clearly wrong. It squeezed out massive domains of culture – religion, law, political economy, ideas of patriarchy, family, and gender, ideas of race and slavery, class and nationalism, nature and reason – that everyone knew to be tangled in the revolutionary impulse.[12]

For this reason, this thesis is careful to address the relationship of republicanism to other forces.

Read in the light of the 'paranoid mindset', the convent narratives stand revealed as part of the conspiracy theorist's apparatus of persuasion. They share a complex of ideological positions with other genres, for example anti-slavery and anti-Mormon works, and the 'anti' narrative is revealed as an ideologically coherent element in a much wider current of belief – that which believed the nation was at risk from evil un- and anti-American conspiracies. James Lewis has enumerated this phenomenon in sociological terms: 'The labeling and persecution of a minority can be understood as being more of a response to the majority culture's anxieties about its own self-identity and values than as a response to tangible threats from the minority group.'[13] This study will argue that the convent narratives published in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century made manifest this phenomenon. The anti-convent writers, steeped in the near-mythic American republican tradition, felt challenged and undermined by the changes occurring over time, and felt a strong urge to identify and define themselves with continual overt and implied reference to the ideals of the Founding Fathers. Their search for identity in many ways paralleled that of the nation itself, a federal union of disparate states, lacking even a 'real' name, rent by violent discord, and facing an uncertain destiny in which disunion was a credible outcome of seemingly irreconcilable divisions.

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[12] Rogers, 'Republicanism: the Career of a Concept', 17.

[13] James R. Lewis, 'Apostates and the Legitimation of Repression: Some Historical and Empirical Perspectives on the Cult Controversy,' Sociological Analysis, 49:4 (1989), 393.

The narratives will be analyzed to show what role fears for the republic played in the genre's establishment and its success. It will be argued that these fears engendered an atmosphere of cultural combat where a number of republicans (unless otherwise stated, the term is used to denote supporters of the American constitution, rather than members of the Republican party) used various literary and rhetorical methods to achieve their ends. The convent narrative formed a part of this struggle. It will be argued that these narratives were not written merely as religious propaganda, but that they also reflected the political, social and cultural beliefs of their creators. It is not suggested that the narratives offer homogeneous views on all subjects, or even that their authors agreed in all respects about the correct policies to follow to ensure the safety of the United States. It will be shown, though, that the writers responsible for creating the narratives felt the nation and its basic political philosophies to be under attack; that these fears were at least in part connected to individual feelings of insecurity caused by rapid social and economic change; and that these feelings, manifested in political apprehensions, played a vital role in the convent narrative genre. Sarah Richardson's description of herself as 'a slave for life' is a representative example of the way convent narratives invoked the rhetoric of freedom and democracy that was so familiar in political discourse in this period.

There have been few studies of convent narratives. These texts have been discussed more frequently in terms of the events surrounding their publication than as historical documents. There has been little detailed analysis of their content. Where they have been studied in the past, scholars have concentrated their attention on the more famous examples of the 1830s, i.e. Six Months in a Convent (1835) and Awful Disclosures (1836.) Ray Allen Billington and Richardson Wright wrote about Monk

and Reed in the first half of the twentieth century, but paid less attention to their works than to their lives and the ways in which the works affected their readers.[14] Increasing interest in popular literature and women's writing in the second half of the twentieth century prompted historians to study hitherto neglected nineteenth-century texts, for example slave narratives and popular novels, and convent narratives began to receive attention, although they were, in the main, discussed purely as anti-Catholic polemics; their worth as evidence for a range of attitudes and beliefs was not fully recognized. In recent years, scholars of literature, such as Susan M. Griffin and Jenny Franchot, have shed important light on the literary techniques and methods the authors of these works used.[15] However, there has been little historical discussion of the significance of the narratives as evidence for attitudes and beliefs, and there has been no detailed study of the more obscure narratives of the 1850s and 1860s. A full analysis of these texts and their significance is required in order to further our understanding, not merely of anti-Catholicism and the campaign against convents, but also the other issues of the day, including the safety of the republic, the nation's social and economic heritage and future, and the relationships of men and women, parents and children, and clergy and congregation.

While this thesis aims to analyze the convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s as they related to wider political and social beliefs, the truth or otherwise of the allegations made is outside the sphere of the discussion (except insofar as verifiable factual errors may demonstrate the extent to which a writer is informed about his or her topic.) The Catholic rebuttal of such allegations is similarly outside the scope of this

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[14] See Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 99-108; Richardson Wright, Forgotten Ladies (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1928), 121-155.

[15] See Jenny Franchot, Roads to Rome (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Susan M. Griffin, Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

thesis, although it comprises a large body of literature which is equally ripe for deeper study.

One of the challenges posed by the subject of convent narratives has been that of structuring the discussion. This is because there are so many interlinking strands of thought in the convent narratives. These different elements of the convent narrative mentality have been grouped in chapters. The rest of this chapter will examine the origins of the nineteenth century American convent narrative, discussing the importance of medieval and renaissance anti-clericalism, Reformation propaganda, the Enlightenment, and popular Protestantism and anti-Catholicism in shaping the genre of the convent narrative. The literary antecedents of these texts, will then be explored, for example the Gothic novel and the captivity narrative. The second chapter will give more detail on the authorship, publication history, storylines and main themes of the American convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s, allowing these details to provide context without interrupting the flow of the discussion in the later chapters.

Chapter 3 will address the importance of ideas of womanhood and the family in the convent narrative genre, which are vitally important in these texts and which give context for the rest of the thesis. The fourth chapter then addresses the importance of socio-economic factors in the genre, principally immigration, industrialization and urbanization. These were of huge importance to anti-Catholic discourse in this period and provide vital background for the analysis of the convent narratives. The fifth chapter will analyze in detail the political concerns of the narratives and the context of anti-Catholicism in American political theory, and will discuss the concerns for the safety of the state found in the narratives. The sixth will focus on the religious concerns of the convent narratives, discussing the influence of Protestant theology, Roman

Catholic expansion, and clerical insecurity among Protestants. Chapter 7 will compare the anti-Catholic crusade with other movements, for example the anti-slavery movement and the temperance movement, giving an additional dimension to understanding of the form, and demonstrating that the convent narrative was part of a larger current of propaganda activity by social activists.

The rest of this chapter places the convent narrative genre in its historical and literary context, introducing the forms and themes that contributed to the genre's growth between 1850 and 1870. While those individuals who were involved in anti-convent agitation may not have been familiar with the forerunners of nineteenth-century anti-Catholicism, it is important to outline these in order to understand the origins of the rich complex of attitudes and beliefs which underlay prejudice against Catholics and Catholic institutions.

Medieval and renaissance anti-clericalism

The American convent narrative drew on numerous sources. Hostility to convents is as old as convents themselves. In much medieval and renaissance writing, nuns, monks and priests are derided as lustful and greedy hypocrites, attacked as cruel, and pitied as deluded. All these themes are iterated in the American convent narrative. Such anti-clericalism played an important part in establishing the stereotypes that fed the American narratives.

These tropes were central to medieval and renaissance writing and grew from popular stereotypes combined with unfavourable reports from within the hierarchy itself. Graciela Daichman argues that in the fourteenth century, for example, 'audiences

would not have expressed shock or even mild surprise at the presence of a possibly wayward nun in a literary work.' She identifies bishops' visitation reports as a source of literary anti-convent feeling in this period: 'improper, and often indecent behaviour was recorded by the bishops in their visitation reports….Profligate nuns were not a rare phenomenon in the Middle Ages; they were, instead, a matter of intense concern – also dismay and disgust, even – to the guardians of the spiritual life and the laughing stock of countless others.'[16] The visitation reports, while admittedly providing evidence of actual behaviour, must be viewed also as tools used to rebuke nuns and to encourage conformity to expected standards of behaviour. To an extent, the reports share a purpose with the convent narratives; both genres attack transgressive women and warn their readers of the dire consequences which attend the contravention of accepted standards.

Geoffrey Baskerville made extensive use of visitation records in his 1937 work on the suppression of the English monasteries. On this evidence, he argued that 'there can be no doubt but that women often exercised a most unwholesome influence on the discipline and peace of many a monastery.'[17] He cited an order 'to expel the prioress and nuns from the convent of St. Radegund' made in 1497 on the grounds of 'the dissolute conduct and incontinence of the prioress and nuns on account of their vicinity to the University of Cambridge.'[18] He also pointed to the evidence of 'Cardinals Contarini, Caraffa, Sadoleto and Pole, together with the Archbishops of Salerno and

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[16] Graciela Daichman, Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), xi, xii.
[17] Geoffrey Baskerville, English Monks and the Suppression of the Monasteries (London: Phoenix Press, 2002 [1937]), 85.
[18] Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Henry VII, 72, in Baskerville, English Monks, 100.

Brindisi [who] reported that the religious orders had deteriorated to such an extent that they had become a grave scandal to seculars and did much harm by their example.'[19]

Such historical documents were available to nineteenth-century anti-convent campaigners and provided a valuable source of shocking testimony about the evil tendency of monasticism. Baskerville identified a tendency in historical writing he termed 'scavenging'; he argued that in the aftermath of the dissolution of the English monasteries, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, opponents of Catholicism seized on the evidence of visitation records to emphasize the evils of monasticism.[20] Evangelical Protestant writers like Lewis Tonna and M. Hobart Seymour in Great Britain, and William Hogan in the United States, quoted the visitation reports to give weight to their criticism of the convent. If the Catholic authorities themselves had again and again acknowledged the corruption of the monastic system, these writers argued, surely this suggested that the convent and the monastery were irredeemable. 'Priests, nuns and confessors are the same now that they were then, all over the world,' Hogan wrote.[21]

There was additionally a wealth of medieval literature which satirized or attacked nuns, monks and priests, including Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and other works, less widely read but influential none the less, by writers including Boccaccio (1313-1375), Poggio (1380-1459) and Aretino (1492-1556). While there were many positive portrayals of priests, monks and nuns, negative stereotypes were persistent.

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[19] Kidd, Documents of the Continental Reformation, 314, in Baskerville, English Monks, 289.
[20] Baskerville, English Monks, 273.
[21] William Hogan, Auricular Confession and Popish Nunneries (London: Arthur Hall & Co., 1847), 56. See also M. Hobart Seymour, Convents or Nunneries: A Lecture In Reply to Cardinal Wiseman (Bath: R.E. Peach, 1852), 40-41; Lewis Tonna, Nuns and Nunneries: Sketches Compiled Entirely from Romish Sources (London: Seeley's, 1852).

The authors of the literature of the early modern period, even that which was not necessarily didactic in purpose, continued to use the motifs of the licentious nun and wicked priest. For example, Webster's The Duchess of Malfi (first performed 1614, first published 1623) portrays a cruel, greedy and lustful Cardinal', and in Macbeth (c.1606) the Porter demonstrates contemporary prejudices against Jesuits as 'equivocators', at that time stimulated by the trial of Father Henry Garnet for alleged involvement in the Gunpowder plot.[22] As in the medieval era, there were positive depictions, too. However, the persistence of anti-Catholic stereotypes is demonstrated by these extracts.

Medieval, renaissance and early modern sources were critical of nuns, monks and priests. They argued that they were lazy, greedy, ambitious, hypocritical, and licentious. They did not make these claims on theological grounds, but believed hat monasticism allowed the religious to indulge their vices unchecked. These beliefs fed nineteenth-century prejudices.

Reformation propaganda

The Reformation was the first lasting challenge to Papal hegemony in western Europe, and caused seismic shifts both in theological doctrine and in temporal power. Both the Reformation and the bitter ideological, political and military conflicts that followed it had a profound impact on the convent narrative. Protestant attitudes to Catholicism during the succeeding centuries were permeated with suspicion and dread.

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[22] John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi (1623), in Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993); William Shakespeare, Macbeth, II.iii, lines 10-11, in The Norton Shakespeare, 2580.

The totemic figures of the Reformation – chiefly Luther and Calvin, but also others like Zwingli, Melanchthon and Knox – were hugely important in the creation of Protestant identity. Protestant didactic literature regularly invoked these figures, and this influenced the convent narratives and anti-Catholic writing generally. The Preface of Six Months in a Convent, (written by its 'committee of publication') invoked the figure of Luther and compared him to Rebecca Reed, arguing they had both been the subjects of unjust attacks:

> We do not propose to institute a grave comparison between Luther's little treatise in the sixteenth century and the Narrative of a six months' residence in a Convent in the nineteenth century, but there are some points of resemblance in the treatment of the two cases that are not altogether unapt.[23]

The authors cite Luther's attacks on monasteries and convents in support of the comparison, and argue that Reed's testimony should be given as much credence as Luther's. They ask 'had the Christians believed the Priests and discredited Luther, where would then have been the Reformation?'[24] The preface invokes Luther to give credibility to Reed's testimony, citing its alleged similarities to his, and also to remind the reader of Luther's criticisms of Catholic practices and also of his own rejection of monasticism, both in his own career and also in his marriage to a former nun.

In the Reformation period, when the advent of printing made books more widely available than ever before, publishers produced anti-Catholic works like John Foxe's Actes and Monuments, also known as his Book of Martyrs (1563) which enjoyed immense popularity. Foxe's work depicted violent and gruesome torture and executions carried out by the Catholic church during the Marian persecution. This setting reinforced the notion that true religion could be overthrown and replaced by tyrannical

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[23] Rebecca Reed, Six Months in a Convent (Boston: Russell, Odiorne & Metcalf, 1835), 4.
[24] Reed, Six Months in a Convent, 5.

anti-religion at any time, as it had been in England in 1553. To a reader of Foxe, the papacy would seem capable of any enormity; his work helped to perpetuate views of Romanism as cruel and despotic, ruling by the torch and the sword and crushing all dissent. Foxe's depiction of torture and murder carried out by the Catholic church was a direct forerunner of the depictions of cruelty in convent narratives.

The legacy of the Reformation was hatred of Catholicism; equally, but distinctly, the legacy of Reformation propaganda was a widespread belief in the unlimited capacity of Rome and Romanists for evil. Both currents of thought strongly influenced nineteenth century anti-Catholicism and the American convent narrative.

Reason, revolution and disbelief

The era of Enlightenment, with its stress on reason and scientific enquiry, deeply affected attitudes to Catholicism in many quarters and, in a wider sense, to religion itself. Figures like Hobbes, Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau challenged many of the assumptions underlying Christianity. These writers evinced strong anti-clericalism; while medieval anti-clericalism was critical of human failings, these thinkers attacked religious institutions themselves. Some writers, like David Hume, embraced atheism; others, like Voltaire and Rousseau, adopted Deism and other non-traditional forms of Christianity.

Liberty was an important theme in Enlightenment thinking, and was regularly invoked in anti-Catholic and anti-convent writings. The author of Startling Facts for Native Americans (1855) suggested as much by her or his choice of subtitle: 'a Vivid Presentation of the Dangers to American Liberty, to be Apprehended from Foreign

Influence."[25] The anonymous author of Pope or President? claimed in 1859 that 'it is to undermine and destroy our national liberty, that the religious liberty of our country is attacked.'[26]

Denis Diderot's work The Nun (first written circa 1760, first published 1796) is similar in form to many of the later American convent narratives. He objected to convents, based on his enthusiasm for freedom and his belief that the life of a nun was unnatural. For Diderot, this unnatural seclusion has 'unnatural' results, from the trivial ('in a convent, every unpleasant incident which takes place in the world is invented. True stories are distorted, false ones invented, and grateful praise is always ascending to God,') to the serious (the Mother Superior's desire for Suzanne.)[27]

The philosophical questions encouraged by the Enlightenment perpetuated anti-clerical and even anti-religious ideas which, while not noticeably weakening the faith of the authors of convent narratives, added to anti-convent feeling and contributed practical and rational arguments against monasticism to existing theologically-based criticisms.

Popular anti-Catholicism

Popular anti-Catholicism was manifested and perpetuated in the day to day actions of the people, not merely in the sermons, speeches and writings of rulers, clergymen and writers. One example was the tradition of Pope's Day. The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 had engendered the persistent tradition of burning a 'guy.' Pope's Day – a

[25] Anonymous, Startling Facts for Native Americans: a Vivid Presentation of the Dangers to American Liberty, to be Apprehended from Foreign Influence (New York, 1855.)
[26] Anonymous, Pope, or President? Startling Disclosures of Romanism as Revealed by its Own Writers. Facts for Americans (New York: R. L. Delisser, 1859), 234.
[27] Denis Diderot, The Nun [La Religieuse] (London: New English Library, 1966 [1796]), 137-139.

New England custom of holding an annual parade on the fifth of November, culminating in the burning of the Pope in effigy, which was directly linked to the Gunpowder Plot – were a tangible reminder of early modern hatred for popery. Pope's Day continued to be observed until the 1760s, and thereafter sporadically until the French joined the Revolutionary War on the American side, when it was banned by Washington.[28]

Catholic immigrants were targeted in various outbreaks of violence. From the 1790s onwards, for example, American-born crowds paraded on St Patrick's day bearing effigies called 'paddies' in order to taunt Catholic immigrants, and this practice regularly provoked violent responses which escalated into rioting between Catholics and Protestants.[29]

One of the most significant outbreaks of anti-Catholic violence was the burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown in 1834. Rebecca Reed's allegations about the convent, later published in Six Months in a Convent, were already circulating when the convent was attacked. The riot itself was sparked by the case of Elizabeth Harrison, who had briefly left the convent before returning, by all credible accounts, of her own accord. The 'escape' was attributed by the convent authorities to mental illness caused by overwork, but it was popularly believed that she had been incarcerated against her will. Such accusations were fuelled by the local press and by anti-Catholic sermons. A mob set fire to the building and desecrated the convent's chapel and tomb. Although none of the ten to twelve nuns and fifty to sixty school pupils in the building were hurt,

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[28] See Francis D. Cogliano, No King, No Popery : Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 23-32.

[29] See Paul Gilje, Rioting in America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 64-68; David Grimsted, American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9, 12.

they were subjected to a frightening ordeal and lost most of their belongings.[30] The episode demonstrated that hostility to Catholicism was not merely theoretical or academic, but rather a living and growing hatred. The Catholic authorities attempted to gain compensation from the courts on various occasions in the years that followed, meaning the episode was regularly revisited in the press.

There were further violent incidents in the years that followed, culminating in the Philadelphia riots in 1844. The first of these riots occurred when participants in a nativist rally took shelter from the rain in an Irish district, and a battle between nativists and Irish Catholics quickly ensued. Two Catholic churches and numerous Irish-owned houses were destroyed, and a teenage nativist, George Shiffler, was killed. (Shiffler was depicted as a martyr in the 1855 novel The Arch Bishop by Orvilla Belisle.[31]) The second riot in Philadelphia occurred when rumours began to circulate to the effect that Catholics had hidden armaments in a church. A nativist crowd gathered at the church, causing the authorities to send the militia to guard it. In the riot which followed, approximately ten nativists were killed and twenty wounded, while two members of the militia were killed and 23 were wounded.[32] The violence that occurred was an extreme manifestation, but the views held by rioters were, to an extent, characteristic of public opinion. The events described above show that Catholicism was a serious issue for a section of the American public.

Events abroad contributed to sectarian conflict. During the first half of the nineteenth century, there were a number of incidents in Europe which alarmed

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[30] For more see Louisa Whitney, The Burning of the Convent (Boston: A.R Good & Co., 1877); Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 71-76; Nancy Lusignan Schultz, Fire and Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834 (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

[31] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855), 259.

[32] Gilje, Rioting in America, 67.

Protestant observers, who feared a growing Catholic church. During the 1820s, the Catholic church appeared to be resurgent in Europe, with the passage of Catholic Emancipation in Great Britain and the formation of Catholic missionary societies in Austria and France for the purpose of promoting Catholicism throughout the world. These events were interpreted, by anti-Catholic observers, as evidence that the Church of Rome sought to expand its temporal dominions at the expense of Protestant countries. The failed republican uprising in Italy in 1848-1849 was another occurrence which influenced American opinions of Catholicism. Several convent narratives and other anti-Catholic works remarked on the state of Italy, finding it lamentable, and attributing this to the influence of the papacy. Edward Goodwin wrote, in the anti-Catholic novel Lily White (1858), that in Italy, 'where once assembled thousands, rejoicing in the full sunlight of freedom, now crouch a wretched peasantry, down-trodden by the iron heel of Roman Catholicism.'[33]

The United States had very close cultural and ideological links with Great Britain. In the 1840s, the development of the Tractarian movement within the Anglican church in England suggested that Catholicism was becoming more acceptable in some Protestant circles. The movement is mentioned in Sister Agnes (1854); the heroine's conversion to Catholicism is assisted by the parish clergyman, 'a zealous Tractarian', but, 'being the clergyman of the Establishment,' the heroine's father 'did not object to his daughter following his footsteps.' Thus begins her inevitable conversion to Rome.[34]

Another controversial issue at this time was the British government's funding of the Maynooth Roman Catholic seminary. In 1845 the government increased the amount of money it gave to Maynooth, which was the principal training college for

[33] Edward Goodwin, Lily White: A Romance (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1858), 65.
[34] Anonymous, Sister Agnes; or, The Captive Nun. A Picture of Convent Life. By a clergyman's widow. (New York: Riker, Thorne & Co., 1854), 55.

priests in Ireland. Although the college had received government funding since its foundation in the late eighteenth century, the Academic Institutions (Ireland) Act of 1845 considerably increased the annual grant on the grounds that the previous funding had proved inadequate to the needs of the college. This was widely perceived as a subsidy of Catholicism by tax-paying Protestants and there was vocal opposition to the enactment. In 1850 the Catholic hierarchy of bishops and dioceses was restored to England and Wales. At this point British 'no-Popery' escalated, rapidly culminating in riots. The celebrated Newman-Achilli case took place at roughly the same time; in a bid to discredit Giacinto Achilli, a Protestant convert who was travelling in Britain giving 'no Popery' lectures, Cardinal Newman claimed that Achilli had lived a dissolute life while a priest in Italy. In the subsequent legal action the jury found in Achilli's favour, while the lurid allegations about a former Catholic priest, made by one of Britain's most prominent Catholic leaders, did nothing to improve the popular perception of Catholicism among Protestants.[35]

The topic of convents was very controversial in Britain in the early 1850s and this debate is very likely to have influenced American anti-convent writers during this period. The establishment of convents and monasteries added to the distrust felt by Protestants towards the Catholic church in Britain. The situation was made worse when a number of Anglican women started to gather in communities which closely resembled convents. Certain orthodox Protestant writers and speakers, such as M. Hobart Seymour and Lewis Tonna, attacked convents and called for their regulation. Seymour in particular entered into a lengthy controversy with the restored Archbishop, and future cardinal, Nicholas Wiseman, over the establishment of convents on British soil in

[35] John Wolffe, The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 125.

a series of lectures (rapidly reproduced as pamphlets) which drew large audiences (possibly attracted by the advertised exclusion of ladies, explained by the sexually explicit material Seymour chose to present in support of his arguments.) These lectures took place in Bath in 1852.[36] In the same year controversy arose over Anglican 'convents', especially one particular institution run by a Miss Sellon in Devonport, where inmates were allegedly mistreated.[37] It seems likely that some of the many pamphlets and lectures published on this subject made their way across the Atlantic. (While no copies of these pamphlets have as yet been located in American collections, these documents were frail and they may have disintegrated.)

Literary antecedents

The convent narrative genre drew upon a number of literary traditions. In their quest to write a persuasive narrative, these writers used the conventions – either by design or unconsciously – found in other popular forms. (The literary techniques used in the convent narratives will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 below.)

The 'confessions' genre influenced the development of the convent narrative. The Confessions of St Augustine of Hippo were written between AD 397 and AD 398 and were the first in this genre. These works described his sinful youth and his conversion to Christianity – a progression which in many ways foreshadowed the plot of the convent narrative, which frequently concluded with the protagonist embracing reformed Christianity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau borrowed Augustine's title for his own

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[36] M. Hobart Seymour, Convents or Nunneries: A Lecture in Reply to Cardinal Wiseman, also Nunneries: A Lecture (Bath: R.E. Peach, 1852).

[37] The controversy first arose with the publication of Miss Sellon and the 'Sisters of Mercy by James Spurrell (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1852.)

Confessions in 1769 (this work was posthumously published in 1785.) Once printing and publishing became widespread, and began to be utilized for pornographic purposes, the genre was co-opted by producers of bawdy texts, which were another source for the convent narratives. Examples include The Confessions of a Magdalen (New York, 1831) and Confessions of a French Catholic Priest (1837.)

Another influential form was the captivity narrative. Over 1600 white colonists were taken captive by indigenous people in New England alone between 1675 and 1763.[38] Over a thousand escaped, and many published narratives of their experiences, which in some cases sold enormous numbers of copies and continued to sell in the nineteenth century.[39] June Namias has suggested that women's captivity narratives presented, at different periods, different character archetypes which corresponded to the social and cultural ideals of the time. After 1820, the archetypal victim of captivity is described by Namias as 'the frail flower.' Namias notes that 'frail Flower narratives include brutality, sadomasochistic and titillating elements [and]… pleas for sympathy and commiseration with the author's suffering'[40] Depictions of young, frail and beautiful women in peril are widespread in the convent narrative and bear a close resemblance to Namias's description.

David Haberly argues that, while the early captivity narratives had been concerned to demonstrate God's power and mercy, suggesting that 'captivity, suffering, and final redemption were all part of God's plan,' by the nineteenth century, in contrast, 'what remained, in its essence was violence'; lingering depiction of torture and murder,

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[38] June Namias, White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 7.
[39] David Haberly, 'Women and Indians: The Last of the Mohicans and the Captivity Tradition', American Quarterly 28:4 (1976), 431.
[40] Namias, White Captives, 25, 29, 36, 37.

recalling the more sensationalistic convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s.[41] J. Norman Heard identifies a tendency among women captives to relate 'that sexual abuse of their fellow captives was common but…that because of some unusual circumstance they, themselves, had been spared the ordeal.'[42] This is again reminiscent of the convent tales, where protagonists are commonly spared from violation at the last moment, partly in order to show the mercy of God and the efficacy of republican manhood in contriving an escape, but also partly in order that the heroine's virtue be preserved; The Convent's Doom (1854) offers an example (the hero, Henry, fears his love has been raped by a priest):

> 'Has yonder villain dared - ?'
> He could not find words to convey his meaning, but his form trembled like a person with the ague as he waited for her answer.
> 'No, no, Henry!' she cried as she buried her head on his bosom; 'no, no, but God be praised, you came just in time!'[43]

'Seduction' novels, like Samuel Richardson's novels Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded (1740) and Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady (1748) and the first American novel, The Power of Sympathy by William Hill Brown (1789) are also relevant to the convent narratives. Their enormous popularity familiarized the reading public in the United States with the story of the young woman in danger and the means she might use to escape from that danger – or her inability to escape. Described in these terms, the similarity between these sentimental novels – where the 'virtue' of the central character is placed in danger – and the convent narratives becomes evident. These novels were well read in the United States and were extremely popular. Hart interestingly suggests that the traditional view of the godly denouncing novels may have

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[41] Haberly, 'Women and Indians', 433.
[42] J. Norman Heard, White into Red; a study of the assimilation of white persons captured by Indians (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1973), 101, quoted in Haberly, 'Women and Indians', 436.
[43] Charles Frothingham, The Convent's Doom: A Tale of Charleston in 1834: Also The Haunted Convent (Boston: Graves and Weston, 1854), 18.

been exaggerated, presenting evidence that the famous divine Jonathan Edwards gave a copy of Pamela to his daughter.[44] These novels dramatized the dangers presented by a corrupt society to a young and defenceless woman, arousing the reader's sympathies and righteous anger. In later years, the authors of the convent narratives came to use similar techniques.

The themes of imprisonment and endangered femininity were shared by captivity and convent narratives; the latter drew on the well-established veracity of the former to suggest the truth of their own messages. Other avowedly fictional genres also contributed to the ways in which the convent stories were written. English Gothic novels, for example Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Monk by M.G. Lewis (1796), frequently used motifs of Catholicism – the abbey, the monk, the nun, the priest – in their plots. These novels made use of the sinister connotations that were widely recognized by Protestant readers, and used them to further their plots of mystery and intrigue, inducing suspense in the reader. Many of the themes popularized by Gothic novels were used by anti-Catholic writers in the nineteenth century including madness, cruelty, imprisonment and the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition.

Hart argues of Pamela that it offered 'the didactic purpose and moral outlook on which the middle class prided itself…at the same time it had the titillating descriptions of an adolescent girl constantly agonizing on the verge of sexual experience."[45] Another precursor to the convent narrative was unambiguously intended to arouse; the pornographic novel. Steven Marcus has argued that 'Roman Catholicism

[44] James D. Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 55.
[45] Hart, The Popular Book, 55.

is a pornographer's paradise.'[46] Tracy Fessenden believes that 'the nun-as-prostitute figure is ubiquitous in Western cultures.'[47]

The works of the satirical writer Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), for example, were well known by readers in Elizabethan England. His writings have been described as 'perhaps the first [works] of their kind in Christendom.'[48] While the works of other writers like Boccaccio were bawdy, Aretino's works were straightforwardly pornographic. His Dialogues were published in London in 1583-1554; this work, with another, Ragionamenti (1534-1536), and La Puttana Errante (c.1530), which was commonly misattributed to Aretino, told stories of prostitutes, unfaithful wives and immoral nuns and clergy.[49] Many of the scenes in these works make use of the tropes of the predatory abbess, licentious priest and lustful nun. Scholars have identified a range of references to Aretino in early modern English writing; his works are mentioned by Ben Jonson and John Donne among others.[50] David C. McPherson argues that 'Pietro Aretino's name was almost as well-known in Elizabethan England as Machiavelli's.'[51] Although Aretino and his fellow Italian pornographers lapsed into obscurity in later centuries, these references indicate their popularity in early modern England, and demonstrate the prevalence of Catholic imagery in early pornography.

John Usher, the leading bookseller in Boston in the 1680s, famously stocked at least two pornographic works, one entitled The London Jilt, or the Politick Whore

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[46] Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 62.
[47] Tracy Fessenden, 'The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman's Sphere', Signs 25 (1999-2000), 452.
[48] Saad El-Gabalawy, 'Aretino's Pornography and Renaissance Satire', Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature 30:2 (Spring, 1976), 87.
[49] For more on the attribution of La Puttana Errante see G. Legman in The Horn Book; Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1964), 91.
[50] Ben Jonson, Volpone, (III.vii.58-64) 58-61, The Alchemist, (II.ii.43-45), 227, both in Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); Satyre 4 (line 70), in John Donne, The Complete English Poems, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: Everyman, 1994 [1985]).
[51] David C. MacPherson, 'Aretino and the Harvey-Nashe Quarrel', PMLA, 84:6 (October 1969), 1551.

(1683), and another called Venus in the Cloyster, or The Nun in Her Smock (1725), which adopted the same formal convention as Aretino's The Ragionamenti – a dialogue between a sexually experienced woman (in this case a professed nun) and a younger girl (here a novice.)[52] The connection of the nunnery and the brothel was an obvious one for readers steeped in the traditions discussed above. The use of the trope of the immoral nun in pornography suggests that a proportion of readers derived pleasure from contemplating the (fantasized) enormities of Catholicism. Suggestively, the anonymous Nocturnal Revels: or, the History of King's-Place, and Other Modern Nunneries (1779) used the metaphorical apparatus of the convent to depict London brothels and their inhabitants; the 'nuns' are prostitutes and the 'abbess' is a 'madam.' This work, written by 'a monk of the order of St. Francis', offers readers a history of the 'modern nunnery' and describes the practices to be found there. This device enables the writer to associate his depictions of prostitution with the believed immorality of monasticism. A veneer of respectability is added by the introduction's claim that 'The treachery, perfidy, and stratagems of what are stiled LADY ABBESSES, are depicted in their genuine colours, and afford a melancholy but useful picture of the depravity of human nature, and to what lengths infamy can prevail even in a female breast.' This anticipates the convent narrative's defence of its lurid content on the grounds that it was intended to serve as a warning.[53]

While the bawdy books of the eighteenth century tended to adopt a humorous and celebratory tone, by the 1820s pornography was likely to feature eroticized rape, foreshadowing the sexual abuse detailed or implied in most of the convent narratives.

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[52] Hart, The Popular Book, 15-16; Roger Thompson, 'The Puritans and Prurience: Aspects of the Restoration Book Trade', in H.C. Allen and Roger Thompson (eds.), Contrast and Connection: Bicentennial Essays in Anglo-American History (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1976), 39-45

[53] Anonymous, Nocturnal Revels: Or, The History of King's-Place, And Other Modern Nunneries (London: M.Goadby, 1779), Vol. I, v., iv, xi, Vol. II, 108.

One example is The Lustful Turk (1828) which incorporates the rape of a nun (who has been walled up alive as a punishment for attempting to escape) by an abbot.[54] Clearly the theme of the convent was one which was extensively used by pornographic writers and one which conveyed enjoyably double meanings of repression and licence to readers.

It is not only overtly pornographic works which are of relevance. Other, more respectable works appealed to readers for similar reasons. For example, Karen Halttunen identifies links between the sentimental novels Pamela and Clarissa and the works of the Marquis de Sade:

> Heavy with sexual victimization, psychological torture, and a sadistic voyeurism [they] would eventually appeal to the Marquis de Sade, who revelled in the prolonged torment and rape of Clarissa and based his novel Justine (1791) on the perils of Pamela.

She identifies a range of genres including captivity narratives, sensationalistic journalism and anti-Mormon exposés which, in her view, 'all appealed to a popular voyeuristic taste for scenarios of suffering.' She argues that by the nineteenth century, sadism and suffering was 'the central convention of English pornography', and, given the speed of transmission across the Atlantic, it can be inferred that this influenced American readers of pornographic texts.[55]

Halttunen cites George Bourne's Picture of Slavery in the United States of America (1834) as an example of eroticized pain, and asks 'was it possible…that [the reformers'] spectatorship [of the evils of slavery] had generated in them a positive taste for cruelty?'[56] This is of immediate relevance to the convent narrative given that Bourne

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[54] Anonymous, The Lustful Turk (London: Star, 1985 [1828])
[55] For a more detailed survey of sadism in nineteenth-century pornography see Marcus, The Other Victorians.
[56] Karen Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', American Historical Review 100 (1995), 308, 313, 315, 326.

wrote probably the earliest American convent narrative (Lorette, 1833) and was involved in the production of the most famous, Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures. The narratives are not universally steeped in sadism and not all suggest that nuns are physically or sexually abused; those that do, though, almost revel in their depictions of violence and suffering. It seems probable that such depictions helped boost sales among a sensation-hungry public. However, it is also likely that the authors of the texts were indulging their own preoccupations with the forbidden, with eroticized power, and with violence; preoccupations fed by the pornographic and the semi-pornographic works which did so much to shape attitudes to sexuality in this period.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the American convent narrative drew upon several different European and American traditions. Non-denominational anti-clericalism contributed to a general cynicism about the religious and the belief that they were, on the whole, greedy, lazy and lustful. The Reformation and its associated propaganda associated Catholic monasticism with specific ills which were, Protestants believed, connected to the theology of Romanism. The Enlightenment period saw a new focus on the evils of authoritarianism and dictatorship which inevitably led to attacks on monasticism, an institution associated with the promotion of perfect and unquestioning obedience. This is not to say that autocracy was under threat, merely that the ideals of liberty and independence enjoyed an increasingly wide currency.

It has been shown that anti-Catholicism was closely associated with fear of the power of Rome, both at a practical level (fear of invasion or usurpation) and at a

theoretical level (fear of mental subjugation.) The convent narratives were similarly imbued with these fears. However, there were many other perceived threats to the republic, of which writers, politicians, clergymen and others were constantly aware (and constantly warning their audiences about); threats ranging from Mormonism to free love, from intemperance to slavery, and including all extremes of radicalism. Such figures almost invariably justified the attacks they made on others and their beliefs - beliefs in many cases protected by the American constitution - by claiming that the natural tendency of such beliefs was harmful to the republic. Thus defence of the republic became the favoured rhetorical device for criticizing almost anything, although this is not to suggest that those who adopted this technique were insincere in their fears. This thesis will proceed to demonstrate the role the authors of the convent narratives played in the wider national project of defending the republic and its people from real and imagined enemies, to show the strategies they used, and to argue that the narratives were defending a way of life as much as they were attacking one.

Chapter 2: American convent narratives

The previous chapter introduced the themes of this study and placed the convent narrative genre in the context of historical anti-Catholicism, literary developments and American life between 1776 and 1850. This chapter introduces the texts that will be analyzed in this study and gives information about their authors, editors and publication history as well as outlining the plots and principal themes of these works. European and pre-1850 convent narratives are also introduced and discussed.

Convent narratives contained the interaction of two elements; an ideological objection to Catholicism and monasticism and a storytelling element telling the story of a nun or another woman imprisoned in a convent. There were many polemical tracts on the subject of Catholicism generally, like the anonymous Pope, or President? Startling Disclosures of Romanism as Revealed by its Own Writers. Facts for Americans (1859) as well as works critical of monasticism like Priests' Prisons for Women (1854) by Andrew Cross. These works did not contain a narrative element and so are not treated here as convent narratives, although they are of great value in revealing contemporary attitudes and are cited when relevant.

Convent narratives before 1833

In the years prior to 1833 various publications denounced convents through the medium of a story of an imprisoned nun. These included British works like the anonymous Anecdotes of a Convent (1771), The Convent: or, the History of Sophia

Nelson by Anne Fuller (1786) and The Nun (1833) by Mary Martha Butt (later better known as Mary Martha Sherwood.) The first novel published in Canada by a Canadian-born author was Julia Beckwith Hart's St Ursula's Convent; or, the Nun of Canada (1824) (although it actually said very little about the convent of its title.) Similar texts were also published in other European countries, most notably La Religieuse (1796) by Denis Diderot. There do not appear to have been any American convent narratives published in this period.[1]

In this period, the plots of the narratives were more variable than in later years. Some of these works followed the sentimental epistolary novel form and did not display the polemical anti-convent zeal found in later works. The sentimental novels used the convent as a backdrop, a convenient device for the separation of would-be lovers and a mechanism for the creation of difficulties and stumbling-blocks to a happy resolution. Any comment on monasticism or Catholicism appears to have been an afterthought for these writers, whose works prioritized plot over theme.

The authors of the most novelistic convent narratives in this period, those that adopted a sentimental and epistolary tone, were usually women, or wrote anonymously, suggesting they were likely to have been women. Not much is known about most of them and these works are rarely read now. These writers appear to have been novelists first and foremost, further suggesting that their use of convents was motivated more by the demands of plot than by ideological fervour.

There were also British examples of 'true' narratives, like that found in a 1822 reprint of an anti-Semitic work, The Miraculous Host Tortured by the Jew, subtitled

[1] Anonymous, Anecdotes of a Convent (London: T. Becket & P.A. de Hondt, 1771); Anne Fuller, The Convent; or, The History of Sophia Nelson (London: T. Wilkins, 1786); Mary Martha Butt [afterwards Sherwood], The Nun (London: R.B. Seeley, 1833); Julia Beckwith Hart, St Ursula's Convent, or, the Nun of Canada. Containing Scenes from Real Life (Kingston: H.C.Thomson, 1824); Denis Diderot, La Religieuse (1796.)

'One of the Legends which Converted the Daughters and Niece of Douglas Loveday, Esq' and incorporating Mr. Loveday's *habeas corpus* petition to the French Chamber of Deputies demanding the custody of his twenty-one year old daughter, who had entered a French convent voluntarily. The author told this story from the perspective of the nun's father, and detailed his attempts to remove her from a French convent, apparently against her will. The book appeared when legal proceedings were still in progress; Loveday's petition was ultimately rejected. This work attacked Catholic superstition and the power of the Roman hierarchy:

> The preceding history of the *Bloody Host* is the foundation of one of those pious frauds through which the crafty devotees at Paris seduced the female branches of Mr. Loveday's family from affection to their parents, and enrapt their youthful feelings in the delusions and deliriums of an anti-Christian and degrading superstition.[2]

This work was published, and probably also written, by William Hone (1780-1842), the printer, reformer and satirist. It does not appear that he was a career anti-Catholic and it is likely that the appeal of the story for him lay in exposing the injustice claimed by Mr. Loveday.[3]

Others texts, like Diderot's and Sherwood's works, anticipated the form of the later convent narratives, where the story begins with a young woman's incarceration in a convent and details her treatment there and the scenes she witnesses. The story ends when the nun either escapes, vowing to relate her tale and to warn others against Catholic intrigue, or dies. She may be murdered on the orders of the convent

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[2] Anonymous [probably William Hone (1780-1842)], The Miraculous Host Tortured by the Jew Under the Reign of Philip the Fair in 1290; Being One of the Legends Which Converted the Daughters and Niece of Douglas Loveday, Esq.; With Mr. Loveday's Narrative &c (London: William Hone, 1822), 16.

[3] See Caroline Ford, 'Loveday, Emily Mary (*b.* 1799)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, online edn, Oxford University Press, Oct 2007 [http:// www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/96076, accessed 18 Sept 2008].

authorities or she may simply waste away from unhappiness. This plot remained common in convent stories.

Diderot approached the convent from a rationalist Enlightenment perspective, complaining that it stifles natural human reactions and has a distorting effect on its inmates, making them depraved and cruel. Sherwood's Protestant perspective meant that she was critical of Catholicism and convents on doctrinal grounds. At the same time, she and Diderot shared many views of the convent as being an unnatural environment and one that encouraged cruelty and ignorance. Both writers were concerned with the rightful position of women in society in addition to their philosophical and religious objections to convents.

La Religieuse clearly demonstrated Diderot's ideological preoccupations even though it started life as a joke against a friend.[4] It may even be that the writing of La Religieuse crystallized his thinking on female monasticism, or at least gave it a new prominence in his mind. Certainly, the message of La Religieuse is a serious one.

Unlike Diderot, Mary Sherwood was, like the sentimental novelists, a professional writer of fiction. Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novels clearly influenced The Nun and it is more serious and oppressive in tone than the sentimental novels. Sherwood was a member of a different writing generation. While she clearly found convents to be an inspiration to her writing, she also displayed a Protestant sensibility which gave an ideological dimension to her story.

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[4] Richard Griffiths, 'Note on the writing of La Religieuse,' in Denis Diderot, The Nun [La Religieuse] (London: New English Library, 1966 [1796]), 13-14.

American convent narratives of the 1830s

The first American convent narrative was Lorette (1833) by George Bourne (1780-1845). It predated the burning of the Ursuline convent by one year, the publication of Six Months in a Convent by Rebecca Reed by two, and Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery by three years. This timing suggests that anti-convent feelings were strongly evident before the burning of the convent. Lorette was published in 1833 by W.A. Mercein of New York. A further edition was published by C. Small, also of New York, in 1834. Published in the same year as Sherwood's The Nun, it was very different in tone. In this story, two young men encounter a young woman who is subsequently abducted by Catholic priests. She later finds out that she is the daughter of a nun. Her mother has been inveigled into a convent which functions essentially as a brothel for priests. After telling this story she later dies. The young heroine is menaced in various ways by priests before being immured in a convent and dying from an illness which is not specified but which resembles consumption.

George Bourne was an English-born clergyman who moved to the United States in 1804, becoming a Presbyterian minister in 1810. While living in Virginia he denounced slavery which resulted in his presbytery expelling him in 1815. He subsequently became a Congregationalist minister, and later a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, regularly moving around the north east and Quebec, and becoming the publisher of The Protestant and the editor of the Christian Intelligencer. He was best-known as an abolitionist and was a friend of William Garrison and Arthur Tappan. (Lorette was dedicated to Tappan 'as a tribute of respect for his Christian philanthropy

and zeal, on behalf of the blind and wretched, by his faithful servant, George Bourne.'[5]) He wrote the well-known abolitionist works Picture of Slavery in the United States of America (1834) and A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument (1845). His experiences in Maryland inspired him to become an abolitionist and he adopted his strident anti-Catholicism after a sojourn in Quebec, where Lorette is set. When Maria Monk first emerged in 1836, claiming to be an escaped nun, Bourne was one of a group of ministers and reformers who assisted with the preparation of her manuscript.

Six Months in a Convent (1835) was claimed to be the work of Rebecca Reed (c. 1813-1838), a young girl who had lived in the Ursuline Convent at Charlestown for a time. It was published in Boston by Russell, Odiorne & Metcalf. A subsequent edition was published in 1860 in Philadelphia by T.B. Peterson.

Reed lived near the Charlestown convent. She claimed that she had been tricked into becoming a novice there and that she had been subjected to excessive punishments and penances in the convent, described at length in the narrative. The Superior of the convent rebutted the allegations of cruelty and stated that Reed had been merely a servant, rather than a novice or nun. Reed appears to have 'escaped' by simply walking out of an unlocked gate. Daniel Cohen has argued that there had existed a history of conflicts between Reed's extended family and the Ursuline convent, and that this generated tensions that found an escape in rioting, suggesting that anti-Catholicism may not have been the only factor in the riot, indeed that it may even have been more of an excuse than a reason.[6] Reed converted to Episcopalianism and confided her story to her pastor, the Reverend William Croswell, who arranged for it to

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[5] George Bourne, Lorette: Or, the History of Louise, Daughter of a Canadian Nun (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1836 [1833]), vii.

[6] Daniel Cohen, 'Alvah Kelley's Cow: Household Feuds, Proprietary Rights, and the Charlestown Convent Riot', New England Quarterly, 74 (2001), 531-579.

be published.[7] Some believed that the circulation of her tales had contributed to the burning of the Ursuline convent. Reed died in 1838 of consumption which, the notice of her death asserted, had been caused by her residence in the unhealthy atmosphere of the convent.[8]

Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures (1836) is the most famous American convent narrative. Monk (1816-1849) made various lurid claims about the Hôtel Dieu convent in Montreal. Her story was that she had run away from home to the convent as a young girl; that she had later left, stolen money from her mother and married; that the marriage was unhappy and that she decided to escape it by returning to the convent. On taking the veil, she claimed, she learned that the nuns were obliged to submit to the sexual demands of priests. The notion of the convent as a brothel was not new, as described in Chapter 1, but the treatment of this theme in the Monk narrative strongly recalls that in George Bourne's Lorette. George Bourne was indeed an associate of Monk's but did not meet her until 1835 at the earliest, meaning that the fictional Lorette (1833) could have influenced the supposedly true Awful Disclosures, but not vice versa. The timing of the book, following Lorette and Six Months in a Convent by a few months while being more sexually explicit than either of them, strongly suggests its authors planned and executed it in order to take advantage of the interest in convent narratives, in all probability to make money while also promoting anti-Catholicism.

Monk described a catalogue of penances, punishments and tortures in detail. She stated that the convent authorities murdered both nuns and new-born infants, and that their bodies were disposed of in pits of quicklime. She claimed that she became

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[7] See Harry Croswell, A Memoir of the Late Rev. William Croswell, D.D., Rector of the Church of the Advent, Boston, Massachusetts. By His Father (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1853), 141-142.
[8] Boston Daily Advertiser, March 1, 1838, quoted in Nancy Lusignan Schultz, 'Introduction', Veil of Fear: Nineteenth Century Convent Tales by Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk (West Lafayette, Indiana, NotaBell Books, Purdue University Press, 1999), xiv.

pregnant while in the convent and, determined to save the life of her baby, she contrived to escape. Her ordeal concluded when she found shelter with the Reverend William K. Hoyt (sometimes spelled Hoyte); she was then persuaded (she claimed) to write her narrative in order to warn other women of the dangers they faced. This ended the story proper, although numerous works were subsequently published both supporting and debunking her account.

Maria Monk was born in Canada. Her mother asserted, in a deposition to a New York court, that Monk had received a head injury as a child which had affected her mental health. She arrived in New York in 1835 with Hoyt, who publicized her story. As mentioned above, a group of nativist reformers and clergymen assisted in the preparation of her narrative. These were Hoyt, George Bourne, Arthur Tappan, Theodore Dwight and J.J. Slocum. It later emerged in the course of a court case that Slocum was the actual author of the narrative. For several months Monk was fêted in New York society. Eventually, sufficient contradictory evidence emerged to raise serious doubts about the veracity of Monk's claims. The most damning evidence was that of the editor and publisher, William Leete Stone, who went to the convent to inspect it and concluded that Monk had never been there. Stone was well-known to hold anti-Catholic views, which made his testimony all the more convincing.[9]

Subsequent to this, Monk disappeared for a short time. On her reappearance, Monk and Hoyt claimed that priests had abducted her. However, she had actually been sheltering with a doctor, William Sleigh, who published his diagnosis of her mental

[9] William Leete Stone, Maria Monk and the Nunnery of the Hotel Dieu : Being an Account of a Visit to the Convents of Montreal, and Refutation of the "Awful Disclosures" (New York: Howe & Bates, 1836).

instability.[10] In the face of the evidence, Monk continued to protest that her allegations had been true, but once she became pregnant again, reputedly with Hoyt's child, she lost any remaining support. The last ten years of her life were passed in obscurity. She died in prison in 1849, having been arrested in a brothel for picking pockets.

Awful Disclosures was published in New York by Howe & Bates. It is commonly thought that this firm was a dummy, set up by Harper & Brothers (run by James Harper, later Know-Nothing mayor of New York from 1844-1845) which wished to profit from the book but which was reluctant to be associated with its scandalous content. However the imprint also published translations of chapters from the Bible into the Mohawk language on behalf of the Young Men's Bible Society of New York, and a Temperance Text-Book (all 1836). Howe & Bates also published William Leete Stone's exposé. It is possible that the publishers believed that Monk had been discredited and sought to make a profit on Stone's book instead. Monk's Further Disclosures (1837), claiming that she had been abducted, was published under the imprint of J.J. Slocum. The Howe & Bates imprint does not appear to have been active after 1837. There were numerous subsequent editions of Awful Disclosures by other publishers who had a track record for anti-convent books; T.B. Peterson of Philadelphia published editions in 1836 and 1854 and De Witt and Davenport published a version in New York in 1855.

Six Months in a Convent and Awful Disclosures portrayed working-class women while the class status of Lorette's heroine is uncertain. These books were all published in the north east. There were no narratives set in the southern states published in this period, although the Catholic presence was significant in certain parts

[10] Dr. W.W. Sleigh, An Exposure of Maria Monk's Pretended Abduction and Conveyance to the Catholic Asylum, Philadelphia, by Six Priests, On the Night of August 15, 1837 (Philadelphia: J.K. & P.G. Collins, 1837).

of the south. This reflects both the power of anti-Catholicism in the north and the importance of Boston and New York as publishing centres at this time. These works were exclusively concerned with attacking the Catholic church, priests and convents. They argued that Catholicism kept its adherents ignorant and allowed them to be abused by clerics. They represented brutality and suffering in wearying detail. Other themes are almost entirely lacking; from the context these stories are given, they could have taken place anywhere and at any time. They reflect an almost obsessive hatred of Catholicism, years before the huge migrations of the 1840s and 1850s greatly multiplied the number of Catholics in the United States, and, at the same time, a fascination with pain and suffering.

American convent narratives 1850-1870

After 1837 the convent controversy died down to a large extent. Although convents remained controversial, few writers published convent narratives in this period. This may have been due to the severe economic downturn which may have dampened anti-convent fervour. In the 1850s there was a resurgence in the number of anti-convent and anti-Catholic works published in the United States which lasted into the 1860s. This was associated with the massive rise in Catholic immigration which began in the mid 1840s and which coincided with numerous other social, economic and political changes. There were also numerous anti-Catholic novels in this period which were not convent narratives as such but which mentioned convents and nuns, and these will be cited where relevant.

The Baptist clergyman Thomas Ford Caldicott (1803-1869) wrote Hannah Corcoran in 1853. It was published in Boston by Gould and Lincoln and reprinted in the same year by another Boston publisher, Palfrey & Co. This text details the 'real-life' case of Hannah Corcoran, an Irish girl living in Charlestown, Massachusetts, who, having converted to Baptism, was supposedly persecuted and abducted by a priest, before eventually being released. Although she did not live in a convent, the theme of imprisonment means that the narrative is of relevance. Caldicott's central theme is the unaccountability of the Catholic church and its intolerance of conversion to Protestantism.

Jane Dunbar Chaplin (1819-1894) wrote The Convent and the Manse (1854) under the pseudonym of 'Hyla.' It was published, again in Boston, by J.P. Jewett & Co., the publishers of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). Chaplin was a novelist and the co-author of the Life of Charles Sumner (1870), and also wrote on anti-slavery themes. She probably lived in Providence, Rhode Island at the time of writing the book. In this novel, two young sisters, Isabel and Virginia, are sent respectively to a convent school and to live with an aunt in New England. The author wrote that 'if the reader sits down to the perusal of this tale expecting a deep-laid plot of cunning or cruelty, he will be disappointed'; this narrative stressed the dangers posed by Catholicism and convents to the well-being of the nation and the spiritual well-being of its adherents, rather than sensationalized violence or sexual abuse.[11] Isabel encounters ignorant and hypocritical nuns, yet finds the appeal Catholicism makes to the emotions and senses seductive, while Virginia enjoys the blessings of wholesome and simple Protestant family life. The contrast between the two is the main theme of this narrative.

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[11] Jane Dunbar Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1853), iii.

Cara Belmont, about whom nothing further is known, wrote The City Side (1854). It was published by Phillips, Samson and Company of Boston, a company which also published works by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The book comprises a number of self-contained stories in which the character of Mr. Forester, a minister, is the common thread. One of these stories is called 'The Convent Escape' and is concerned with the tribulations of a young girl, Nell Crowninshield, the daughter of a rich merchant, who is sent to a convent school. She is seduced by a priest who persuades her to become a nun. Once in the convent, is the authorities subject her to cruel penances and deadening religious exercises. She manages to escape and converts to Protestantism – one of the few seduced nuns in the fiction of this period whose story ends relatively happily in spite of her seduction. Priestly immorality and duplicity is the central concern of the narrative.

Charles W. Frothingham wrote three anti-convent stories, The Convent's Doom and The Haunted Convent, published together in 1854, and Six Hours in a Convent (1855). These were published by Graves and Weston in Boston. The Convent's Doom was reprinted seven times and reportedly sold 40,000 copies in ten days. Six Hours in a Convent was reprinted at least fifteen times within two years. Graves and Weston also published the journal The American Union, a family newspaper which published early works by Louisa May Alcott. Little is known of Frothingham except that he had a famous name and may have been connected to the more famous Frothingham family, although this has not been proved. The author may even have appropriated the name as a pseudonym. The Convent's Doom is set in Charlestown in 1834. The hero's sister is a nun, incarcerated in the Ursuline convent, and the hero, with the assistance of a secret society which closely resembles the Know Nothings (who were reaching the peak

of their support in 1854), storms the convent and rescues his sister. An angry mob subsequently burns the convent. Frothingham claimed his sister had been an inmate of the Ursuline nunnery but he manifested only a very vague knowledge of the institution or the circumstances surrounding its destruction. The story's success encouraged Frothingham to publish Six Hours in a Convent, which had essentially the same plot, the following year.

The Haunted Convent tells the story of a politician who, in order to win Catholic votes, agrees to send his daughter to a convent school in Canada. Because he is wealthy and his daughter is an heiress, the convent refuses to allow her to leave. Her lover breaks into the convent and rescues her, and they escape from Canada, pursued by various Catholic clergy. Frothingham promoted the ideology of the Know Nothing party throughout these works.

Danger in the Dark, another anti-convent story, was written by Isaac Kelso and published in 1854. It was unusual in that it was published in Cincinnati, further west than most of the convent narratives (by the firm of Moore Anderson, Wilstach & Keys). Little is known about Kelso. He probably lived in Missouri and appears to have been a Methodist. His novel was reprinted at least 31 times. It tells the story of various young women who are induced by Catholic intriguers to become nuns and describes their rescue, both from the confines of the convent and from the superstition and spiritual emptiness which, according to Kelso, results from monastic life. Kelso also stressed the effects of priestly scheming and suggested the hypocrisy and immorality of the Catholic clergy.

Miss Bunkley's Book: Testimony of an Escaped Novice (1855) was published under the name of Josephine Bunkley, who claimed she had been encouraged to enter

the Convent of St. Joseph in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and imprisoned there before contriving to escape. Bunkley lived in Norfolk, Virginia, and grew up as an Episcopalian. She stated that she had asked an acquaintance to read her account of her experience, which he sent to the firm of De Witt and Davenport without her approval. The firm proceeded to advertise it as a sensational exposé in the Maria Monk mould under the name of The Escaped Nun. Bunkley went to court to prevent publication and succeeded in having the book pulped. She then published her own, more respectable, version under the name of Miss Bunkley's Book, with the assistance of an editor, whose identity is unknown. Miss Bunkley's Book was published by Harper & Brothers, perhaps the most prominent of New York's publishing firms at this time. (Its subsidiary, Howe & Bates, had published Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures in 1836). Another edition was also published in London by Allman & Sons in 1857.

Bunkley's narrative stated that she had been persuaded to the join the convent on the grounds that it offered a spiritual home and a refuge from the cares of the world. However, on arrival, she claimed that she encountered cruelty, immorality and superstition, that the authorities forbade her to communicate with friends and relatives, and that she was kept in the convent against her will. The narrative concluded with her 'escape' which appeared to consist in simply walking out of the door. The major thrust of Bunkley's narrative was that convents, in separating women from family life, encouraged cruelty and immorality. However, Bunkley later recanted her story and apologized to the Catholic church in 1859.[12]

The novel The Arch Bishop (1855) was written by Orvilla Belisle and published by the Philadelphia firm William White Smith. It was reprinted at least three times.

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[12] Thomas Parramore et al., Norfolk, The First Four Centuries (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 181.

Belisle is an obscure figure. All that is known of her is that she was the author of another novel attacking Mormonism called The Prophets (also 1855). The Arch Bishop is chiefly concerned with the activities of the scheming Archbishop of the title, clearly a distorted portrait of the Archbishop of New York, John Hughes, and his machinations in pursuit of power, both for himself and for the church. It does, however, tell the story of a young and beautiful Catholic girl who is pressed by her confessor to join a convent, who refuses, and who subsequently disappears from the confessional, and is imprisoned in a church (in 'one of the cells', wrote Belisle, implying that prison cells were commonly to be found in Catholic churches).[13] Her confessor attempts to seduce her and eventually drugs and rapes her. She escapes when a mob sets fire to the building but dies as a result of suffocation and fear. The Arch Bishop argued that the Catholic church was attempting to establish itself as the major power in American life; that it had introduced the Inquisition to the United States; and that Americans could expect to be tyrannized and irredeemably corrupted should these schemes come to pass.

The novel Viola (1858) was written by William Earle Binder and published in New York by Evans & Co. Binder also wrote the anti-Jesuit novel Madelon Hawley (1857). Again, nothing further is known of him. The title character is a young heiress who is sent to a convent school against her will because of intrigue by her uncle, a Jesuit. The convent sends her to work in a fever hospital where she meets and falls in love with Kenneth Egerton, the novel's hero. Egerton rescues Viola from her uncle's assassination attempt, and he and Viola marry. The novel centred chiefly on the wickedness of Jesuits.

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[13] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855), 72-73.

Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (1858) was another 'true' story, written by Sarah Richardson (born 1835), who claimed to be an escaped nun. It was published by Damrell & Moore of Boston. Richardson claimed she had been sent to the convent as a child because her father, an alcoholic, could not take care of her. She described innumerable brutal punishments and also various ways in which the convent authorities induced superstitious terror in order to make the nuns more malleable. One escape attempt was unsuccessful but she did, she claimed, manage to free herself and leave Canada for the United States, where she converted to Protestantism. According to her narrative, Richardson settled in Worcester, Massachusetts after her escape, where she married. She dictated her narrative to Mrs. Lucy Ann Hood, the daughter of her employer in Worcester. Mrs. Hood's husband Edward was credited as the book's editor. This narrative was concerned in the main with the cruelties supposedly practiced in convents and with the power of the Catholic clergy in Canada.

The Beautiful Nun (1866), also known as The Jesuit's Daughter, was written under the name of 'Ned Buntline', the pseudonym for Edward Zane Carroll Judson (1821-1886). It was published in Philadelphia by T. B. Peterson, a leading publisher of cheap novels which also reprinted Awful Disclosures (1854) and Six Months in a Convent (1860). Buntline/Judson appears to have lived in Stamford, New York at this period. He was a journalist and publisher but is best known as a publicist and 'dime novelist.' His works were crude and sensationalistic. To try to summarize the convoluted plot of The Beautiful Nun in a short space would not do it justice; suffice it to say the story concerns Jesuit machinations, seduction, forced imprisonment, mistaken identities, demagoguery and brutality. Buntline was concerned with the effect

of large-scale Catholic immigration and with the seemingly unchecked power of the Catholic clergy.

The 1869 novel Priest and Nun was written by Julia McNair Wright (1840-1903). It was published in Philadelphia by Crittenden & McKinney and reprinted at least six times. An edition was published in London in the same year. Wright was a prolific writer on a range of subjects and was an active Presbyterian. Three years later she published Secrets of the Convent and the Confessional (1872), reflecting the continued, if lessened, interest in convents after 1870. In Priest and Nun a group of young girls encounter convent life in different ways and with different consequences, from atheism to self-destructive asceticism. Concurrently, priests and nuns plot to make converts and to steal inheritances. Wright's central themes were the spiritual effects of Catholicism and monasticism on young women, and the undue power, temporal and spiritual, wielded by priests.

It appears, from the limited evidence available, that these authors came from a variety of places, backgrounds and denominations. Their works were published, in the main, in New York and Boston, although a handful were published in other cities such as Cincinnati and Philadelphia. While some anti-Catholic authors, like Augusta Evans, were Southern, the majority who wrote about convents came from the North. Miss Bunkley's Book concerned a convent in Maryland, but was published in New York. Anti-convent writers also made allegations against a convent in Baltimore in the local press (see below, 92, 231). Overall though, there were very few stories about convents in the south. This suggests that Catholic immigration, which was to a great extent concentrated in the north, was an important factor in the convent narrative.

The 'true' narratives in this period concerned women of varying backgrounds, from Josephine Bunkley who appears, from the internal evidence, to have been relatively well-to-do, to Sarah Richardson, who seems to have come from a poorer background. However, in fictional accounts, the central female characters tended to be from wealthy families. The depiction of genteel women seduced by Catholicism seems to have been popular among these novelists. This may have played on fears of society's 'upper' and most influential classes becoming corrupted. This would suggest that the perception of there being a 'governing class' had not been entirely abandoned in the Revolution. It is also likely that novelists chose to portray wealthy heroines because they were more glamorous and more interesting to those readers who seeking escapist entertainment.

These authors' shared anti-Catholicism was clearly associated with their Protestant faith, but it is not possible to form any but the broadest generalizations about these writers on the basis of the biographical data which is currently available. Any conclusions drawn about these writers on the internal evidence of the texts must be made with this caveat.

There were many other American novels which attacked Catholicism and convents, but which did not take the convent as the main subject of their story. These included Carlotina and the Sanfedisti by Edmund Farrenc (New York: John S. Taylor, 1853), Inez: A Tale of the Alamo by Augusta Evans (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), Madelon Hawley by William Earle Binder, author of the 1853 convent narrative Viola, (New York: H. Dayton, 1857) and Annie Wallace: or, The Exile of Penang by Harlan P. Halsey (New York: Miller & Holman, 1858). These are cited where relevant.

Numerous anti-monastic narratives were published between 1840 and 1870 in other countries, especially Great Britain. Examples include Father Eustace by Frances Trollope (London: Henry Colburn, 1847) and Miss Sellon and the "Sisters of Mercy" by the Reverend James Spurrell (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1852). These have been referred to when they have helped to illuminate American attitudes to convents.

This chapter has given an overview of the texts which are analyzed in this study. It has briefly described the narratives and the circumstances of their publication. The next chapter will discuss in detail the attitudes expressed towards women and the role of women in the convent narratives, which permeate the texts and interrelate with their views on a range of other subjects.

Figure 1 – American Convent Narratives

Title	Alternative titles	Author	Place of publication	Publisher	Date	Subsequent editions
Lorette: Or, the History of Louise, Daughter of a Canadian Nun		George Bourne	New York	W.A. Mercein	1833	New York: C. Small, 1834 Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1836
Six Months in a Convent, or, the Narrative of Rebecca Theresa Reed		Rebecca Reed	Boston	Russell, Odiorne & Metcalf	1835	Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1860 Glasgow: John Robertson, 1835 Edinburgh: 1836 London: 1850; 1851; 1852
Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery	Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk The Character of a Convent	Maria Monk	New York	Howe and Bates	1836	Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1836; 1854 New York: De Witt & Davenport, 1855 London: 1836 Manchester: Milner, 1836 Edinburgh: A. M'Kerracher, H. Robinson, 1836 Paisley: A. Gardner, 1836 Wakefield: 1836 London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1851 Tiel [Netherlands] : Gebr. Campagne, 1852. London: J. Smith, 1854
Further disclosures by Maria Monk, concerning the Hotel Dieu nunnery of Montreal		Maria Monk	New York	J.J. Slocum	1836	New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1837

Decisive Confirmation of Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures		Samuel B. Smith	New York	'Published at the offices of the Downfall of Babylon'	1836	
Hannah Corcoran: An Authentic Narrative of Her Conversion from Romanism, Her Abduction from Charlestown, and the Treatment She Received During Her Absence		Thomas Ford Caldicott	Boston	Gould and Lincoln	1853	Boston: Palfrey & Co, 1853
The Convent and the Manse		Jane Dunbar Chaplin	Boston	John P. Jewett & Company	1853	
The City Side; or, Passages from a Pastor's Portfolio		Cara Belmont	Boston	Phillips, Samson and Company	1854	
The Convent's Doom: A Tale of Charleston in 1834: Also The Haunted Convent		Charles Frothingham	Boston	Graves & Weston	1854	At least eight American editions
Danger in the Dark	Light, More Light	Isaac Hudson Kelso	Cincinnati	Moore Anderson, Wilstach & Keys	1854	Cincinnati: E. Rulison, 1855 (10th ed.) Cincinnati: E. Hampson, 1855 Reportedly 31 editions in total

Miss Bunkley's Book: Testimony of an Escaped Novice	The Escaped Nun	Josephine Bunkley	New York	Harper and Brothers	1855	London: Allman & Son, 1857
The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States		Orvilla S. Belisle	Philadelphia	Wm White Smith	1855	At least four editions
Six Hours in a Convent; or, The Stolen Nuns!		Charles Frothingham	Boston	Graves & Weston	1855	At least sixteen editions
Viola: or, The Triumphs of Love and Faith. A Tale of Plots and Counterplots		William Earle Binder	New York	Evans and Company	1858	
Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal. An authentic narrative of the horrors, mysteries, and cruelties of convent life		Sarah J. Richardson	Boston	Damrell & Moore	1858	
The Beautiful Nun	The Jesuit's Daughter	Ned Buntline	Philadelphia	T.B. Peterson & Brothers	1866	
Priest and Nun		Julia McNair Wright	Philadelphia	Crittenden & McKinney	1869	At least seven American editions London: 1869

Chapter 3: Women, families, convents, and the American republic

This chapter discusses views of femininity and family and will demonstrate that the authors of convent narratives saw these as vital elements in an unceasing struggle against ominous threats to the republic. These issues were popular topics at this time and were regularly associated with the wellbeing of the nation. The ideal of home was elevated in a way which was new, and which accompanied the decline of home industries, with more people earning their living outside their abode.

Ideal women in this period were expected to be submissive to patriarchal authority, specifically that which was vested within the family. Linda Kerber argues that 'Just as white democracy in the antebellum South rested on the economic base of slavery, so egalitarian society similarly rested on a moral base of continuing deferential behavior among as class of people – women – who would devote their efforts to service: raising sons and disciplining husbands to be virtuous sons of the republic.'[1] Women were subject to legal discrimination. They were, by law, considered the dependents of their male relatives. This meant that the family relations between men and women had implications that were not just social but also legal, political and economic. Women could not vote, they had fewer property ownership rights than men, and there were no principle of equal employment rights. A woman who married a foreigner might lose her American citizenship. Women were also constrained in the fields of business, education and social life by both the weight of public opinion - which punished transgressive women by criticism, exclusion and even ostracism - and by actual barriers to advancement placed in their way. This is not to say that women never overcame these hurdles or enjoyed authority over men; indeed the reverse is the case.

[1] Linda Kerber, 'The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment - An American Perspective', American Quarterly, 28:2 (1976), 203.

However, these patriarchal expectations are of great importance in studying the convent narratives, whatever the actuality may have been.

The United States in the nineteenth century remained profoundly influenced by its past and its religious and social heritage. Protestantism exerted a strong influence over ideals of womanhood, both by demanding particular standards of behaviour, and ritualistically, in the way women participated in religion. It is true to say that there were a large number of denominations and that these all perpetuated differing forms of worship; for example, the Quakers' belief in the equality of the sexes was demonstrated by the practice of allowing Quaker women to participate in worship on the same terms as men. However, this egalitarianism was persecuted, particularly during the early settlement of New England, suggesting that it was unacceptable to the majority. By contrast, Puritan men and women played different parts in worship, women being expected to assume a more passive role. Those who did not suffered retribution. Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) was banished from Massachusetts for transgressing Puritan expectations of female behaviour, and Mary Dyer (c.1611-1660), having become a Quaker, was hanged for defying the law banning Quakers from Massachusetts. Marilyn J. Westerkamp suggests that the rules and forms of worship and behaviour in church in Puritan New England affected early modern perceptions of women in America: 'in general, the only women who did speak publicly in church were those called to answer for their sins: women's speech was being transformed into a symbol of sin and disorder.'[2] Symbolically, the restriction of speech in church to the recitation of sins may have been a powerful image of the difference between manhood and womanhood. These perceptions had not been altogether eradicated by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

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[2] Marilyn J. Westerkamp, Women and Religion in Early America 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 38.

Similarly, the legal heritage of the United States perpetuated notions of the inferiority of women. In the revolutionary and post-revolutionary years some women had enjoyed increased power and autonomy because of the immense social dislocation of the period. However, as the new nation stabilized any gains in women's position and status receded. They were considered the dependents of their male relatives. This meant that family relations between men and women had implications that were not just social but also legal, political and economic. After 1807, when New Jersey excluded women from the franchise, women could not vote anywhere in the United States until 1869, when women were given the vote in the Wyoming Territory. They had fewer property ownership rights than men, and there was no principle of equal employment rights.

Women were not merely regarded as inferior in capability; they were also often considered to be morally inferior in the years before 1850. There was an undercurrent of thought in popular literature to the effect that women, bearing prime responsibility for original sin, would, given the least provocation, revert to the primitive pursuit of sensual gratification. This ran counter, of course, to the ideology of women's moral superiority and is perhaps best understood as a subconscious manifestation of superstitious fears. Carl Degler identifies such a trend in nineteenth century marriage manuals: 'The old idea that women's sexual desires were insatiable seems to have lingered on, though disguised as an admonition to women and a warning to men.'[3] This was the historical context for the development of perceptions of femininity in the United States in the nineteenth century. In the second and third quarters of the century these perceptions underwent significant changes.

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[3] Carl N. Degler, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980), 251.

Ideals of femininity and family were inextricably linked. The concept of the virtuous family in the period 1850-1870 is best understood as a complex of idealized relationships. The family was widely viewed – by clerics, politicians, writers, teachers and even doctors - as the best and happiest manifestation of conjugal and parental love. The reality was rarely this simple, but the ideal exerted a strong influence. In this view the dual forces of patriarchal authority and maternal tenderness supported and reinforced the family. The dominance of the father figure within the family was not new, but the growing sentimental idolization of the mother figure was a distinctly nineteenth-century phenomenon in the United States. The mother came to be associated with a number of functions that had traditionally been a male preserve in earlier years, chiefly education and religious instruction – functions linked to the preparation of a young person for adulthood. The role of the mother in educating her daughters was less of a development than the growing linkage of the mother with the emotional, moral and physical wellbeing of her sons. As this association solidified, the mother's position was elevated and idealized. The role of the mother came to be associated with the preservation of the republic. These shifts coincided with many other social changes in this period, and indeed with the emergence of the convent narrative genre itself.[4]

The idealization of the family was, of course, just that. The extent to which families conformed to this pattern is debatable and does not come within the scope of this thesis. This family model was rooted in middle-class expectations and experience, rather than encompassing all social classes. Working class women, particularly the

[4] There is a large body of work on women in post-Revolutionary America; see for example Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860', American Quarterly, Vol 18 (1966), 151-174; Rosemarie Zagarri, 'The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America', William and Mary Quarterly, Vol 55 No 2 (April 1998), pp 203-230; Mary Kelley, 'Beyond the Boundaries,' Journal of the Early Republic 21:1 (Spring 2001); Carol Lasser, 'Beyond Separate Spheres: The Power of Public Opinion,' Journal of the Early Republic 21:1 (Spring 2001).

poorest in society, had no option but to work wherever and however they could in order to feed themselves and their families, and they may have been unlikely to encounter, let alone adopt the dictats of fashionable women's magazines or novels. It will be argued, however, that this interpretation of the ideal family was the predominant one among a significant number of writers, politicians and clergymen who wielded influence among American communities at this time. They believed that the family represented, in microcosm, the state, and that happy, healthy and virtuous family relationships, revolving around the figure of the mother, could best guarantee the safety of the republic. The family, they believed, was the school in which the citizen learned to love the republic and to honour true religion. In the early nineteenth century, the role of the mother assumed new importance in the achievement of these objectives. At the same time, many men, and women too, were suspicious and distrustful of femininity, whether consciously or unconsciously. The increasing reliance on the mother for moral, spiritual and emotional leadership accompanied by growing apprehension that the family might break down as a result of unmaternal behaviour, meaning that women were scrutinized in new ways. Many people closely linked the survival of the state to the survival of the family.

There were some variations in attitudes to women between different geographical areas. In the western states, the requirements of pioneer life worked against the formation of strict gender norms, because women had to do so many of the tasks characterized as men's work in more settled areas. In the southern states, the distinctive role of the plantation owner's wife, overseeing the domestic arrangements of a large holding, stood in contrast with the reality that many women ran plantations themselves. This work required the practice of many 'male' tasks. Only a tiny minority of white women actually filled either of these roles, yet they were hugely influential in

the creation of female southern identity. Those conventions of womanhood that most strongly influenced the convent narratives were north-eastern in origin, which is unsurprising as these texts were, by and large, north-eastern documents.

This chapter will begin by examining the 'Cult of True Womanhood', identified by Barbara Welter, and will examine the ways in which the convent narratives reflected it. It will then turn to another powerful theory, the ideal of 'Republican Motherhood', posited by Linda Kerber, and will discuss the extent to which the convent narratives promoted this ideal, before addressing more recent work the role of women which has highlighted the complexities and ambivalence of women's roles in this period. The chapter will then look in detail at the relationship of women, families and Catholicism in these texts, the relationship of womanhood and sexuality, and the relationship of women to reform movements and to work.

This chapter does not address in detail the position of slave women within society, simply because the anti-Catholic authors under discussion, with the exception of those who also wrote on anti-slavery themes, do not appear to have paid much attention to them. Chapter 7 below discusses the relationship between nativism and slavery in detail.

The convent narratives offer a rich seam of evidence of attitudes towards women and families. It will be shown that these writers were strongly motivated, in their discussion of the role of women and families, by a shared insecurity and a paranoid mindset that inspired them with fear for the safety of the American republic.

The 'Cult of True Womanhood'

One of the most famous theories of the status of women in nineteenth century America was formulated by Barbara Welter in 1966 in her essay 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.'[5] Welter argued the changing economic, political and social configuration of the United States in the period between the War of Independence and the Civil War put pressure on traditional ideals of manhood, particularly in the industrialized and ex-Puritan north east, and that these pressures caused an evolution in ideals of womanhood. While Welter locates the origins of this 'cult' in the economic changes of the early nineteenth century, it had ramifications for views of women's place in the family. Men were literally and metaphorically absent from the household sphere in this interpretation, and women's roles evolved to encompass these neglected areas. Welter argues

> The nineteenth-century American man…could salve his conscience by reflecting that he had left behind a hostage, not only to fortune, but to all the values which he had held so dear and treated so lightly. Woman, in the cult of True Womanhood presented by the women's magazines, gift annuals and religious literature of the nineteenth century, was the hostage in the home.

Welter identifies a 'complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood'; piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. In this theory these attributes were those 'by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society.'[6] Ann Douglas agrees, suggesting that, as the economy grew in power and aggression, maternity was glamorized, and 'American culture seemed bent on establishing a perpetual Mother's Day.'[7]

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[5] Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood', 151-174.
[6] Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood', 151, 152.
[7] Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (London, Papermac, 1996 [1977]), 6.

The convent narratives posited that women and men were fundamentally different and hence had different rights and responsibilities. The texts argued that women had a specific and important function as homemakers, and that this function was linked to the welfare of the nation as a whole. For example, in The Convent and the Manse (1853), which is about two sisters' experiences of Protestantism and Catholicism, the younger sister, Virginia, stays with a happy and hard-working family while her elder sibling, Isabel, lives with idle and parasitic nuns.[8]

The convent narratives claimed to promote women's welfare, and were concerned to maintain republicanism and Protestant religion. Yet deeper and more self-interested worries, centred on the maintenance of the familial patriarchy, and which may have been related to the 'cult of true womanhood', are manifested in these texts. These writers viewed the control of women by priests, who they believed to be answerable only to themselves and to their superiors in the Catholic hierarchy, as a dangerous usurpation of the rightful functions of the male head of the family. This hostility was manifested from the mid 1830s; the 'Preliminary Suggestions' to Rebecca Reed's Six Months in a Convent (1835) described the convent system as 'a religious discipline destructive of all domestic and social relations', a direct reference to marriage and sexual morality.[9] The convent stood as a direct challenge to the family model. Nancy Lusignan Schultz suggests that, in the 1830s narratives of Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk, 'the convent is seen as a dangerous alternative to Christian marriage, and motherhood.'[10] Such perceptions were still in evidence twenty years later; the 'editor' of Josephine Bunkley's narrative wrote that 'for a young girl educated in a convent to be a good wife and mother is a thing most rare. At Rome it is a common saying, "Do you

[8] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 27.
[9] Rebecca Reed, Six Months in a Convent (Boston: Odiorne and Metcalf, 1835), 6.
[10] Nancy Lusignan Schultz, 'Introduction', Veil of Fear: Nineteenth Century Convent Tales by Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk (West Lafayette, Indiana, NotaBell Books, Purdue University Press, 1999), xxi.

want a faithless woman? Marry a girl brought up in a nunnery." "[11] It was believed that priests gained power over their adherents, especially young female adherents, by usurping the authority that rightly belonged to patriarchal power structures. Jenny Franchot argues that the convent narratives worked to reconcile women to patriarchal oppression and repression:

> The capture of virgins and their rape inside convent walls, their psychological subjection to tyrannical abbess and lecherous father confessor, and the titillating exposure of these indignities for middle-class readers refashioned the seclusion of women inside the domestic sphere of civil society as liberty, their subordination to patriarchal authority as voluntary, their sexual repression as 'purity.'[12]

The 'cult of true womanhood' applied, in practice, to middle-class white women. Mary Kelley has responded to Welter's theory by arguing that, in the course of her own research, 'the fiction I was reading and the lives I was exploring reflected ambivalence, tension, and contradiction. Where Welter found docile compliance with the ideology's prescriptions, I detected acts of subversion.'[13] As mentioned above (63) those women who were (by comparison) disadvantaged probably did not have the opportunity to choose to adopt such a 'cult.' However, 'middle-class' values may have become aspirations for some working-class women, and they should not be dismissed as merely irrelevant to working-class and non-white women. As S.J. Kleinberg points out, 'the new socio-cultural norms…established the terms of the debate over women's roles.'[14] She argues that 'new concepts of womanhood emerged in an attempt to adjust social convention and reality.'[15] Jeanne Boydston has suggested that the view, which informed

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[11] Josephine Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book: The Testimony of an Escaped Novice (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 319.
[12] Jenny Franchot, Roads to Rome (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 120.
[13] Mary Kelley, Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xi.
[14] S.J. Kleinberg, Women in the United States, 1830-1945 (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 57.
[15] S.J. Kleinberg, Women in American Society 1820-1920 (Brighton: British Association for American Studies, 1990), 7.

the 'cult', that men and women occupied 'separate spheres', 'must be viewed at least in part as a hardening of the attitudes of certain groups against specific actual practices of gender they deemed particularly threatening during the political and economic revolutions', that is, as a defensive movement against female autonomy.[16] Amy Dru Stanley notes that 'evidence…abounds that runs contrary to the model of separate spheres', suggesting that it was always a model and an ideal rather than an actual social phenomenon.[17] Tracy Fessenden argues that the construction of the ideology of domesticity was 'part of a larger project of asserting a unified Protestant America in the face of social fragmentation.'[18] This echoes the other adjustments being made perforce by theorists in the fields of politics, religion and economics, and reinforces an interpretation of the United States as undergoing a difficult and traumatic process of self-identification throughout this period. The convent narratives were part of this project.

The Republican Mother

This section discusses the concept of the 'Republican Mother' which was identified by the historian Linda Kerber in 1976 and is helpful in understanding the three-sided relationship between convent narratives, ideals of womanhood and politics. Kerber's theories can help us to understand views of women in the convent narratives and the relationship between gender issues and political concerns.

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[16] Jeanne Boydston, ' The Woman Who Wasn't There: Women's Market Labor and the Transition to Capitalism in the United States', Journal of the Early Republic, 16:2 (Summer, 1996), 205.
[17] Amy Dru Stanley, 'Home Life and the Morality of the Market', in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 81.
[18] Tracy Fessenden, 'The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman's Sphere', Signs 25 (1999-2000), 456.

Kerber argues that women assumed a new importance in inculcating patriotism and republicanism in the post-Revolution period. While iconic women such as Queen Elizabeth I had symbolized patriotism in earlier times, the link between women and American republican ideology was new. In this period there were widespread fears for the safety of the United States as an independent, virtuous republic. The notion evolved that children needed to be educated to be republican citizens from their earliest years.

Kerber posited that 'the republican ideology that Americans developed included – hesitantly – a political role for women. It made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the *polis*.'[19] Kerber identifies Judith Sargent Murray, Susannah Rowson and Benjamin Rush as the first exponents of this theory in the 1790s.[20] For these writers, she argues, '[a woman's] political task was accomplished within the confines of her family. The model republican woman was a mother.'[21] Lydia Hunt Sigourney's book Letters to Mothers (1839) bears out this interpretation by connecting republicanism and motherhood:

> Secluded as [a woman] wisely is, from any share in the administration of government, how shall her patriotism find legitimate exercise? The admixture of the female mind in the ferment of political ambition, would be neither safe, if it were permitted, nor to be desired, if it were safe…It seems fully conceded, that the vital interests of our country may be aided by the zeal of mothers…This, then, is the patriotism of women, not to thunder in senates, or to usurp domination, or to seek the clarion-blast of fame, but faithfully to teach by precept and example, that wisdom, integrity, and peace, which are the glory of our nation.[22]

That these ideas persisted into the min-nineteenth century is suggested by the novel The Curse of Clifton by E.D.E.N. Southworth (1853) in which a character calls his mother 'a

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[19] Kerber, 'The Republican Mother', 188.
[20] Kerber, 'The Republican Mother', 201-202.
[21] Kerber, 'The Republican Mother', 202.
[22] Lydia H. Sigourney, Letters to Mothers (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1839), 13, 14, 16.

heroine of domestic life…She is the only *true* republican I know in this whole Republic.'[23]

Kerber suggested that 'in postwar [i.e. post-Revolutionary war] America the ideology of female education came to be tied to ideas about the sort of woman who would be of greatest service to the Republic.' Such a woman 'integrated political values into her domestic life. Dedicated as she was to the nurture of public-spirited male citizens, she guaranteed the steady infusion of virtue into the Republic.'[24] This theory of 'republican motherhood' posits a special role for women that was not merely based on separate spheres but that had a distinctively American origin and character, and one which clearly links to political concerns for the safety of the republic and republican values.

The influence of 'republican motherhood,' is suggested by arguments that women should be educated for the task. In 1801 the Mercury and New-England Palladium argued that 'The proper object of female education is to make women rational companions, good wives and good mothers.'[25] Some viewed the instruction of children as an opportunity for women to exert power and influence: for example the poet Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865) offered a view of motherhood where dominion over children replaces, and even surpasses that political and social power which women lacked:

> How entire and perfect is this dominion over the unformed character of your infant. Write what you will upon this printless table with your wand of love…Now you have over a new-born immortal almost that degree of power which the mind exercises over the body.[26]

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[23] E.D.E.N. Southworth, The Curse of Clifton: A Tale of Expiation and Redemption (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1853), 58, 60.
[24] Linda K. Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 10, 11.
[25] 'The Restorator – No VII. Female Education', Mercury and New England Palladium, Boston, July 10, 1801. In Zagarri, 'The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America', 218.
[26] Lydia Hunt Sigourney, Letters to Mothers (Hartford, 1838), 10, quoted in Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture, 75.

A close reading of anti-Catholic texts published in the 1850s and 1860s reveals that these texts promoted, to a great extent, the ideal of the 'Republican Mother'. Anti-Catholic novels of this period criticized convents on the grounds that the correct woman's role was to be a nurturing mother. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Agnes of Sorrento (1862), for example, describes an Italian grandmother addressing a print of St. Agnes to this effect: 'you look very meek there, and it was a great thing no doubt to dies as you did, but if you'd lived to be married and bring up a family of girls, you'd have known something greater.'[27] (Stowe's depiction of convent life was by no means bigoted; indeed she wrote of the 'Convent of San Marco' in Florence that 'in its best days, it was as near an approach to an ideal community, associated to unite religion, beauty, and utility, as ever has existed on earth.'[28])

At the same time, there are remarkably few portrayals of mother-child, especially mother-daughter relationships in the convent narratives. The authors of these texts tended to depict motherless young heroines. This does not mean that mothers are unimportant in these texts but rather that the absence of the mother is the catalyst for the heroine's tribulations. That these young women are particularly vulnerable to the seductive appeal of Catholicism because they have lost their mothers underlines the importance of maternal influence. They are vulnerable because the void left by the absent mother offers a point of access for manipulation and exploitation. This was also suggested in other contexts. William Sanger argued in his History of Prostitution (1858) that 'the death of a father is a sad calamity for his children…But a more grievous affliction still is the death of a mother…Bereft of a mother's watchful tenderness, they are comparatively alone in the world, and many of their sorrows must be dated from

[27] Harriet Beecher Stowe, Agnes of Sorrento (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), 38.
[28] Stowe, Agnes of Sorrento, 97.

that event.'[29] The heroines of the novels The Convent and the Manse (1853) and Sister Agnes; or, The Captive Nun (1854) have lost their mothers, and the central character of another novel, Madelon Hawley (1857), is an orphan.[30] Their fates generally bear out Sanger's warning. In the 'true' narrative Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (1857) by Sarah Richardson, Richardson's mother is dead and her father is a drunkard who places her in a convent because he in unable to care for her. The appropriation from Richardson of her mother's jewellery symbolizes the removal of maternal influence from Richardson's life: 'my mother's gold ear-rings were...entrusted to [Priest Dow's] care, until I should be old enough to wear them. But I never saw them again.'[31]

There is one exception in the novel Priest and Nun by Julia McNair Wright (1869.) In this novel, the character of Lilly Schuyler is infatuated with Catholicism and becomes a nun. Her mother upbraids her, stressing her own rightful position as her parent, in contrast to the artificial authority wielded by usurping priests and nuns:

> Child as you are, Lilly, do you belong to me any more? Have not priests and nuns come between you and your mother? After all these years, when you have been my one thought, do you not go to those whom you call your Mother and your Sisters, and trust them instead of me, and follow their counsel to disobey me, and leave me lonely that you may spend your time with them?...Father Murphy is setting me against both husband and child.[32]

The narrator of the novel blames Mrs. Schuyler herself for this state of affairs, arguing that she has failed in her maternal duties through weakness: 'even to her child she had never dared speak strong earnest words for the [Protestant] religion she professed; she had never knelt with that child to pray, never questioned as to the state of her heart

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[29] William W. Sanger, The History of Prostitution : Its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World (Being an Official Report to the Board of Alms-House Governors of the City of New York) (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858), 540.

[30] See Anonymous, Sister Agnes: or, The Captive Nun. A Picture of Convent Life (New York: Riker, Thorne and Co., 1854), 15; 'Hyla' [Jane Dunbar Chaplin], The Convent and the Manse (Boston, John P. Jewett & Company, 1853), 5; William Earle Binder, Madelon Hawley, or, The Jesuit and His Victim: A Revelation of Romanism (New York: H. Dayton, 1857), 97.

[31] Sarah Richardson. Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (Boston: Damrell and Moore, 1858), 5, 6.

[32] Julia McNair Wright, Priest and Nun (Philadelphia: Crittenden & McKinney, 1869), 25.

toward God, never besought her to embrace the Saviour...Had this mother but been able to firmly fulfil a mother's duties, perchance no one could ever have come between her and her child, but closely together they might have walked toward heaven."[33] In these texts, young girls are at risk from anti-American forces because they either lack or reject the guidance and discipline instilled by the ideal mother. This supports and substantiates the need for 'republican motherhood.'

The convent narratives argued that women were integral to the family, and that the family was integral to womanhood and the Republic itself. This identification was important, not merely for private happiness, but for the well-being of the state. In Carlotina and the Sanfedisti (1853) the reformed ex-priest Forli associates family with citizenship; 'What constitutes citizenship? The duties of life. What are those duties? Marriage, family, and the toils of life.'[34] The convent narratives are uniform in their praise of the family as the natural sphere for women and in their condemnation of the alternative mode of living represented by monasticism. In the anti-Catholic novel Annie Wallace (1857) the heroine tells an escaped nun that 'as lady-abbess of the convent, you were giving countenance to these wicked priests; and...now you are returning to your duty, and fulfilling a previous compact, by becoming the wife of a noble Scottish gentleman.'[35]

Once a woman's place within the structure of a family was assured, social norms expected she would exert a moral influence over her sons, husband and father, providing gentle yet effectual remonstrance whenever her menfolk transgressed moral or religious boundaries. Female submission in worldly matters was rewarded, in this

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[33] Wright, Priest and Nun, 33.
[34] Edmund Farrenc, Carlotina and the Sanfedisti: or, A Night with the Jesuits at Rome (New York: John S. Taylor, 1853), 376.
[35] Harlan P. Halsey, Annie Wallace; or, The Exile of Penang. A Tale. (New York: Miller & Holman, 1857), 155.

view, by female authority in spiritual affairs. According to this theory, women's special calling was the education and guidance of children. Republican mothers were expected to instruct their children in true religion and to bring them up to be patriotic and virtuous citizens.

The convent narratives reflect this. The Convent and the Manse (1853) makes the following appeal: 'Mothers, whatsoever your hands find to do, do it with your might, for the night cometh! Give your children not only a true faith, but instill also into their minds the grounds of that faith; for you little know into what hands they may fall when you are gone.'[36] In the convent narratives and other anti-Catholic novels, the heroic female characters save their efforts for the domestic circle rather than the public sphere entered by reforming women.

Like nurturing and moral guidance, the education of children was an important female role in this period. Even unmarried women who did not have children were encouraged to make their home with relatives and to assist in bringing up their young relatives. Many writers argued that women's education was generally deficient. The educator Catharine Beecher (1800-1878) had expressed her dissatisfaction with standards of female education when she wrote, as early as 1827, that 'the education of females has generally been irregular, superficial and deficient. A great part of the knowledge acquired in school is merely mechanical – learned by rote, without any correct ideas attached to the words repeated.'[37] (Her emphasis on the importance of meaning recalled those critics of Catholicism who attacked its observances as mere rites incomprehensible to the participants.) Beecher explicitly linked education with the fate

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[36] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 10.

[37] Catharine Beecher, 'Female Education', in American Journal of Education 2 (Apr-May 1827), quoted in Lyman Beecher Stowe, Saints, Sinners and Beechers (London, Ivor Nicholson and Watson Ltd, 1935), 107. Catharine Beecher was the daughter of Lyman Beecher - whose anti-Catholic sermons were blamed in some quarters for inciting rioters to burn the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown in 1834 - and the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Lyman Beecher Stowe (1880-1963) was Harriet Beecher Stowe's grandson.

of the nation in a letter to a friend in 1829: 'I can see no other way in which our country can so surely be saved from the inroads of vice, infidelity and error. Let the leading females of this country become refined, well educated and active, and the salt is scattered through the land to purify and save.'[38] She even argued that Catholicism better employed the talents of women; 'the clergy and leaders of the Catholic church understand the importance and efficiency of employing female talent and benevolence in promoting their aims, while the Protestant churches have yet to learn this path of wisdom.'[39] Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in 1846 'if then Protestants…will not provide schools of their own, what should they expect?'[40] The narratives of the 1830s did not discuss education much, and focused more on physical and sexual ill-treatment. Views similar to Catharine Beecher's, however, were expressed in the convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s, which criticized the education provided by convent schools. The author of The Convent and the Manse (1853) deprecated convent education: 'at home, [Isabel's] mother had insisted that the hated mathematics, and the other solid branches, should be foremost; but [in the convent,] French and Spanish, the piano and the pencil, light English literature, and the-embroidery frame, divided the time.'[41] The author was clearly of the opinion that the 'solid branches' should form the basis of a sound education, hated or not. Modern Pilgrims (1855) further criticized Catholic education; 'In Mrs. Mead was seen the utter poverty of intellect which a course of education in a convent induces…it seemed as if the spirit of her religion was to know nothing but

[38] Catharine Beecher to Mary Dutton, c1829, in the archives of Yale University Library, quoted in Stowe, Saints, Sinners and Beechers, 118.
[39] Quoted in Daniel A. Cohen, 'Miss Reed and the Superiors: The Contradictions of Convent Life in Antebellum America', Journal of Social History 31:1 (1996), 153.
[40] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'What Will the American People Do?, New-York Evangelist, February 5, 1846, in Joan D. Hedrick, Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 171.
[41] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 87.

what she learned of Father Hildebrand.'[42] The novel The Huguenot Exiles by Eliza Dupuy (1856) claimed that nuns 'were taught sufficient to enable them to understand the lives of the saints, and to do a little light needle-work: that was all towards educating these immortal souls that was accomplished.'[43] These texts expressed fears that convent education was becoming worryingly popular among wealthy Protestants, as in Danger in the Dark (1854), in which the Protestant character Squire Delmont is told that 'parents who wish their daughters highly accomplished, and fashionably educated, are willing to run some risk, in conferring upon them advantages so great...Catholic schools, you know, are far superior.' He responds, as if directly to the reading public, 'that is a sad mistake, into which, I am very sorry to say, numbers of Protestants have fallen. It has no foundation in truth.'[44] In the novel Priest and Nun (1869), a convent school gives an undeserved prize to the daughter of a rich Protestant in order to curry favour[45]

Frivolous female education was also attacked in the temperance novel Edith Moreton (1852), although, in this example, the heroine is not taught in a convent but by Protestants in a fashionable school, which is criticized in similar terms: 'in this so-called seminary of learning [the heroine] learned the refinements of fashionable life…she learned to thrum the piano – gabble a little French and Italian – but the useful branches of education were as much neglected as though they were completely unnecessary.'[46]

'True womanhood' and 'republican motherhood' have connections and contradictions. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has described the tensions between the theories of the 'Republican Mother' and the 'True Woman': 'the True Woman was

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[42] George Wood, Modern Pilgrims: Showing the Improvements in Travel, and the Newest Methods of Reaching the Celestial City (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1855), I, 259.
[43] Eliza Dupuy, The Huguenot Exiles; Or, The Times of Louis XIV. A Historical Novel (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 385.
[44] Isaac Kelso, Danger in the Dark: A Tale of Intrigue and Priestcraft **(**Cincinnati: Moore Anderson, Wilstach & Keys, 1854), 28.
[45] Wright, Priest and Nun, 46-47.
[46] Maria Buckley, Edith Moreton; or, Temperance Versus Intemperance (Philadelphia: published for the author, 1852), 12-13.

emotional, dependent, and gentle – a born follower. The Ideal mother, then and now, was expected to be strong, self-reliant, protective, an efficient caretaker in relation to children and home.'[47] Linda Kerber criticized heavy reliance on the 'Cult of True Womanhood' in women's history in her 1988 essay 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History.' However the 'Cult' and the theory of 'Republican Womanhood' were in many respects complementary. Republican womanhood stressed women's agency and power while the 'Cult of True Womanhood' emphasized submission, yet they shared other values. For example, republican women gained their power through their position as wives and mothers, roles strongly advocated by the 'Cult.' Therefore adherence to one set of values in no way implies rejection or indifference to the other. As two interpretations of women's roles which emphasize rigid ideals and which posit powerful and all-encompassing societal pressures on women to conform, these interpretations can be regarded as having an affinity and as expressing a shared set of values.

The concept of 'Republican Motherhood' is not without its critics, who believe Kerber over-emphasized the links between republicanism, education and womanhood and that the realities of women's existence were more idiosyncratic and individual.[48] However, if the concept is viewed as an ideal (rather than as necessarily reflecting reality) and one which continued to resonate well after the Revolution, it can be helpful in interpreting the convent narratives' views of women.

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[47] Linda Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', Journal of American History 75:1 (1988); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985), 199.

[48] See Margaret A. Nash, 'Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia', Journal of the Early Republic 17: 2 (Summer, 1997).

Recent historiography

In contrast to the theories of 'republican womanhood' and the 'cult of true womanhood', the interpretation of women's history has, in recent years, emphasized the individual nature of every woman's experience, and has tended to discourage theorization based on generalizations. In the words of Inge Dornan and S. Jay Kleinberg,

> In the twenty-first century, hand in hand, with a portrait of 'women's community' that insists on a diversity of female actors, historians are beginning to dispense with interpretive frameworks that rely on neat dichotomies that posit women as independent or dependent, free or enslaved, empowered or powerless. Instead, they increasingly recognize the complexity of women's labor and the myriad forced that shaped their experiences.[49]

The 'bleeding' of the of the private to the public took place both in the field of labor, where women played an important role in industry, domestic labor and teaching, and in the field of social reform, where women played a vital role, and these areas will be discussed further below (112).

Historians like Paula Baker, Suzanne Lebstock, Jean Fagan Yellin, Nancy Isenberg and Nancy F. Cott have written extensively on various facets of women's experience; for example Baker has written on women's political involvement, Lebsock has written on free black women and Yellin has written on women in the anti-slavery and abolition movements.[50] These historians have drawn attention to the ways in which

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[49] Inge Dornan and S. Jay Kleinberg, 'From Dawn to Dusk: Women's work in the Antebellum Era' in S. Jay Kleinberg, Eileen Boris and Vicki L. Ruiz (eds.), The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 100.

[50] Paula Baker, 'The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920', American Historical Review 89:3 (1984), 620-647; Suzanne Lebsock, The free women of Petersburg : status and culture in a southern town, 1784-1860 (New York: Norton, 1984); Jean Fagan Yellin, Women and Sisters: The Anti-Slavery Feminists in American Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Barbara Isenberg, ' "Pillars in the Same Temple and Priests of the Same Worship": Woman's Rights and the Politics of Church and State in Antebellum America', Journal of American History 85:1 (1998), 98-

the realities of women's lives contradicted and undermined the ideals of true womanhood and republican motherhood, and to the enormous variety in women's lives and circumstances. In this context, the concept of 'true women' existing in a purely domestic sphere is clearly an idealization. The reality of women's experience was much more complex. Facets of this experience including women's work, the relationship of women to reform, and attitudes to women who wrote, will be discussed further below.

Recent writing on women's experiences in the United States in the nineteenth-century suggests a sense of ideals and realities almost at war. Convent narratives dealt in ideals but could not escape realities. The historiographical impact of the present work is both to reinforce the importance of the 'republican mother' and 'true womanhood' as models of female behaviour, and to undermine these as straightforward explanations of women's lives in this period.

It can be concluded that the writers and readers of the convent narratives recognized, experienced and perpetuated ideals of womanhood that did not accord with reality, but which did, however, fulfil a political purpose – that of connecting ideals of womanhood with the safety of the republic and the nation's political institutions.

Women and Catholicism

In the next sections of this chapter, the relation of womanhood to Catholicism, sexuality, work and reform will be discussed with reference to the ideas and ideals found in the convent narratives. Anti-Catholic authors wrote convent narratives in the first instance to attack convents and they did so, to a large extent, by attacking Catholicism itself. They were enormously critical of the influence of Catholicism on women and the

128; Nancy F. Cott, Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000).

family, on numerous grounds ranging from the usurpation of patriarchal, familial authority to the belief that convent life adversely affected the health, mental and physical of nuns.

These texts claimed that Catholicism undermined family relationships. As discussed above, the convent narratives suggested that the authority of the husband and father was at risk from Catholicism and monasticism. Anti-convent writers believed that Catholicism and monasticism worked to undermine familial affection and confidence. Josephine Bunkley's narrative, published in 1855, attacked the supposed rule that 'A [nun]…breaks the vow of chastity by looking at a man or woman…in the face unless *required* by duty…If allowed to see a father or a brother, she must not take his hand.'[52] She claimed that nuns were forbidden even the chastest gestures of affection to friends and family, yet were instructed to ignore these strictures at the command of any priest. The priest, in this account, had replaced the husband and father as the head of the family and usurped the power more properly vested in the head of the household.

The anonymous British novel Sister Agnes (1854; republished in New York the same year), further argued that this usurpation occurred even within the home and family itself; the novel claimed that confession was used by priests as 'a secret engine of power over families, by which the priest prys [sic] into all their secrets, and wields complete authority over them.' Auricular confession was one of the elements of Catholicism that was most hated and feared by nativists. The heroine of Sister Agnes is manipulated to such an extent in the confessional that she agrees to deceive her father: 'Once she would have shrunk with horror from deceiving her father; now she believed that the end sanctified the means, and in fact she had resigned her conscience to her

[52] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 131, 133.

confessor.'[53] Josephine Bunkley wrote that 'Auricular confession is the chief and most potent appliance by which the Church of Rome gains ascendancy, and retains supreme control over individual minds and bodies.'[54]

Catholicism could likewise induce a father to betray his daughter. Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (1858) depicts a drunken father who is induced by the Catholic woman who is caring for his daughter to place the girl in a convent:

> The woman with whom I boarded seeing his [drunken] condition, and being a good Catholic, resolved to make the most of the occasion for the benefit of the nunnery. She therefore said to him, 'You are not capable of bringing up that child; why don't you give her to Priest Dow?'…Had he waited for a little reflection, he would never have consented to such an arrangement, and my life would have been quite different.[55]

The author, Sarah Richardson, described the attempts of the nuns and priests of the 'Grey Nunnery' to make her forget her father – 'the priest would tell me that I need not think so much about him, for he no longer cared for me. He said the devil had got him, and I would never see him again.'[56] These extracts dramatized the scenario, dreaded by so many nativists, of the father surrendering his daughter to a priest.

Sister Agnes (1854) argued that Catholicism usurped, and made a mockery of, the functions of the family. The novel contrasted the virtuous submission of a daughter to her father with the more sinister abnegation of the will located in monasticism: 'the habit of soulless obedience was gaining upon her, that of passive unresisting submission to arrogant superiors and inexorable fate. It was not the obedience of childlike confidence, it was the submission of despair.' The Mother Superior's order that the protagonist bow to her distorts and mocks filial obedience: 'I make a footstool of your head,' said the Superior, 'to test *your* obedience, and your humility. It is good for you.

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[53] Sister Agnes, 66, 60.
[54] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 25.
[55] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 5-6. The usage of 'Priest Dow' suggests a Protestant author, unfamiliar with Catholic terminology.
[56] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 28.

You will please not stir until I remove my foot? Lower your head.'[57] The persistence of these ideas over a twenty year period suggests that concerns for patriarchal familial authority were important during both phases of anti-convent agitation.

These narratives also suggested that the confidence held to exist within the idealized patriarchal family was undermined in the convent and replaced by espionage and surveillance. Members of the monastic community enjoyed none of the mutual trust or sympathy found in a happy family. Bunkley wrote that 'the utterance of a single unnecessary word is reported, every part of the building having its spy for that purpose.'[58] According to Sarah Richardson, writing in 1858, 'the most rigid espionage is kept up throughout the whole establishment.' She claimed that 'every individual is a spy upon the rest; and while every failure is visited with condign punishment, the one who makes the most reports is so warmly approved, that poor human nature can hardly resist the temptation to play the traitor.'[59] Anti-Catholics regularly accused the Catholic church of acquiring and wielding power by use of surveillance through the confessional and other means, and Richardson's claim bolstered such beliefs.

These texts portrayed convents as eroding ties of friendship as well as family relationships. In 1855 Bunkley described the systematic destruction of friendship: 'a system of favoritism extensively prevails with the walls. Jealousy also exerts a potent sway throughout the sisterhood.'[60] Sarah Richardson, writing in 1858, depicted a community which makes friendship impossible: 'friendship cannot exist within the walls of a convent, for no one can be trusted, even with the most trifling secret.'[61] The convent narratives describe a community far removed from a true 'sisterhood.' For

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[57] Sister Agnes, 207, 239.
[58] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 77.
[59] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 51, 30.
[60] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 169.
[61] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 30.

nineteenth-century writers, friendship was central to the female experience, and a great source of joy in a world otherwise full of suffering. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes the way in which, in nineteenth-century America, 'Friendships and intimacies followed the biological ebb and flow of women's lives. Marriage and pregnancy, childbirth and weaning, sickness and death involved physical and psychic trauma which comfort and sympathy made easier to bear.'[62] To deny women the opportunity to experience friendship was, for these writers, an act of great cruelty.

The convent narratives also depicted manipulation, spying and deception as important tools in inveigling young women into convents. Sister Agnes (1854) depicted a scheming nun who poses as a governess, converts her charge and persuades her to become a nun, all at the behest of a Jesuit priest who tells her 'Bien! Mademoiselle, of course you have succeeded...for when did Sister Agatha fail in any spells she undertook to weave? You have mesmerized the young heiress – she sees as you bid her, acts as you will, and follows you at the end of an invisible chain.'[63] The following decade, The Beautiful Nun (1866) depicted a priest telling his colleague 'we wish to get a Sister, who is very beautiful and accomplished, and who is well skilled in the art of reading and using human hearts, to cunningly work up a quarrel and a separation between [husband and wife], for then we can get her and her children, and consequently the property completely within our sway.'[64] The narrative depicted the control exerted by priests over nuns, the willingness of priests and nuns to assume false identities and to deceive, and their uncanny ability to manipulate impressionable young women. These acts cause great sorrow and unhappiness, and more importantly, they undermine the family relationships which, these authors believed, shored up the American republic.

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[62] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America', Signs 1:1 (Autumn, 1975), 1-29.
[63] Sister Agnes, 23.
[64] Ned Buntline, The Beautiful Nun (Philadelphia, T.B. Peterson & Brothers, 1866), 42.

Such fears were not confined to nativists. According to their detractors, Mormon leaders (like Catholic priests in anti-Catholic rhetoric) usurped the rightful authority of the (non-Mormon) husband and father. Metta Victor, writing in 1856, quoted a story in the North American and United States Gazette to underscore this point:

> True to their instincts, the crafty elders of Salt Lake made Mormonism so delightful to the neophyte [a young man], and advanced him so rapidly in their fraternity, that he returned to England as a preacher of the delusion. [His] father…returned to the house one Saturday from a business excursion, to find it deserted. His whole family had disappeared, with whatever portables they could lay hands upon; and his wife had stolen his money to no inconsiderable amount – all she could collect or pilfer.[65]

This extract suggests that the authors of convent narratives shared anxieties over the American family's safety with other 'anti' writers. Anti-slavery narratives expressed these concerns especially strongly. They emphasized the cruelty of the slavery institution in its effects on family life. The slave trader Haley says in the very first scene of Uncle Tom's Cabin ' 'Tan't, you know, as if it was white folks, that's brought up in the way of 'spectin' to keep their children and wives, and all that.'[66] Anti-slavery novels regularly depicted the forcible separation of slave families in heart-rending detail. Solomon Northup wrote in his narrative of such a parting: 'I have seen mothers kissing for the last time the faces of their dead offspring; I have seen them, looking down into the grave, as the earth fell with a dull sound upon their coffins, hiding them from their eyes forever; but never have I seen such an exhibition of intense, unmeasured, and unbounded grief, as when Eliza was parted from her child.'[67] Amy Dru Stanley has

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[65] North American and United States Gazette (Philadelphia), quoted in Metta Victoria Fuller Victor, Mormon Wives (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), ix.
[66] Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1981 [1852]), 49.
[67] Solomon Northup, Twelve Years a Slave (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 85. See also Harriet A. Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1861]).

argued that 'By the lights of abolitionists, a free man differed from a slave not only because he was a "free agent" and the sovereign of himself, but because he possessed an inalienable right to his family.'[68]

At the same time, these texts condemn the institution of slavery for weakening virtuous family life by countenancing, even encouraging, sexual immorality between slaveholders and female slaves. Furthermore, in a slave economy, slaveowning wives and mothers are able to avoid their familial duties, like Stowe's Marie St. Clair, who has been pampered and cosseted all her life and is therefore incapable of supporting her family; Marie's 'nervous system had been enervated by a constant course of self-indulgence' and she is incapable of consoling her dying husband, being instead prostrated by fainting fits.[69] These extracts show that anti-slavery literature expressed similar concerns about the safety of the family to those seen in the convent narratives.

The convent narratives suggest that Catholicism undermined family life by including depictions of convent authorities forcing nuns to deceive and manipulate family and friends. Bunkley, for example, wrote in 1855 of being forced to write to her family at the dictation of the Superior; 'I was compelled to write...*at her dictation*, declaring my happiness in my present condition and my entire contentment with it and adding that I would accordingly remain and make my vows at the institution.'[70] (While writing letters at dictation was common in boarding schools, Bunkley was an adult, and was ostensibly imprisoned against her will and unable to communicate with family and friends, making the forced writing of letters at dictation of letters a much more serious accusation.)

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[68] Stanley, 'Home Life and the Morality of the Market', 89.
[69] Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin, 458.
[70] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 100.

The convent narratives, it has been shown, attacked Catholicism for usurping the authority of the father, for manipulating and dividing families, and unwarrantably depriving nuns of the consolations of friendship. Equally important are the numerous denunciations of monastic celibacy found in these works. These texts, and anti-Catholic works in general, strongly promoted female piety, but were strongly critical of any suggestion that there might be a special virtue in vowing lifelong celibacy, and they condemned the vows of chastity taken by Roman Catholic priests, monks and nuns. Protestant theology held that Christian marriage was a blessed gift from God, intended not merely for procreation but also as a means of promoting human happiness and companionship. In the view of most Protestant denominations, to vow chastity was an arrogant act of self-aggrandizement and an unnecessary sacrifice, and the Catholic monastic institutions were merely more perversions of true religion by the Church of Rome.

The convent narratives constantly asserted this belief. In The Convent and the Manse (1853), nuns were depicted as disappointed old maids: 'The inmates are usually middle-aged women, disgusted with life or disappointed in its hopes, who shut themselves out from the beautiful things of God, and then growl at those whom they see through their prison-bars.'[71] In Danger in the Dark (1854), an imprisoned nun asks rhetorically 'These tender sympathies and natural affections that glow within my throbbing breast, did not the all-wise and beneficent Creator himself bestow?'[72] In the same year the anonymous author of Sister Agnes tells the heroine, Mary, 'Poor girl! God could have created thee an angel, if that had been wisest and best for thee. He made thee a woman, a daughter, thou impeachest His wisdom, His benevolence.' The author argued that 'The heart of woman was not made for solitude; she must love or

[71] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 142.
[72] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 11.

die, or be utterly wretched.'[73] The Huguenot Exiles (1856) described its heroine as 'a woman formed by nature to be the charm of her home – the living sunbeam to the heart that was so fortunate as to win her affections; and all this feminine loveliness was to be buried in a convent.'[74] The character 'Annie Wallace' in the novel of the same name (1857) states that 'I do not think that God ever intended that persons should build four square walls around them for the purpose of leading a passionless life of solitude, depriving themselves of comfort and social happiness. Such devotion is not the result of love, but a wrong notion of duty.'[75] As late as 1866, Ned Buntline wrote in The Beautiful Nun 'Don't tell me that a cloister or convent cell, can shut out *Nature* from the heart of a woman; if it does it ought to be torn down. At best, such places are but *prisons* for the *innocent*, and ought not to be allowed to exist in a land so free and enlightened as America.'[76] He linked the well-being of the nation with the well-being of American women. These extracts demonstrate the unanimity on this subject in the convent narratives.

The convents suggested that monasticism and celibacy, and separation from family life, had a defeminizing effect on women. This symbolized with potency by the nun's shorn head. In the novel The City Side (1854) an escaped nun describes the moment her hair was cut: 'As I saw my tresses, which I deemed so beautiful, hewed and hacked to pieces...I wept again.'[77] The scene repeated in Danger in the Dark (also 1854): '[the priest] Dupin inserted into Anna Maria's ebon locks, the sacred scissors, like his own heart, relentless and remorseless! The monster ceased not to despoil until the head was made bare, and the last ringlet dropped from the temples of beauty!' The text

[73] Sister Agnes, 93, 349.
[74] Dupuy, The Huguenot Exiles, 224-225.
[75] Halsey, Annie Wallace, 110.
[76] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 44.
[77] Cara Belmont, The City Side (Boston, Phillips, Samson & Company, 1854), 252.

describes Anna Maria as 'his mutilated victim.'[78] In this extract, the removal of the hair is also emblematic of violent sexual violation. Here, sexual 'ruin' is associated with loss of womanhood.

In these texts nuns are also apt to become violent, another manifestation of defeminization. In 1858 Sarah Richardson described the sadistic punishments meted out by her fellow nuns in the Grey Nunnery for trivial offences: she is burned with hot tongs for closing a door too hard and for not standing erect, and made to fast for two days for not walking correctly. She wrote of the nuns 'it did seem as though they rejoiced in the opportunity to inflict punishment.' In another episode, another nun tortures the dying Superior of the convent:

> [The Superior] was in her power, too weak to resist or call for assistance, and [the nun] resolved to let her know by experience how bitterly she had made others suffer in days gone by. It was a fiendish spirit, undoubtedly, that prompted her to seek revenge upon the dying, but what else could we expect? She only followed the example of her elders.[79]

Such behaviour, for readers of the convent narratives, illustrated a monstrous perversion of womanhood, in which women, created gentle and nurturing by God and nature, were brutalized and stripped of their feminine qualities.

The role of Catholicism in engendering unwomanly violence outside the convent was suggested in Belisle's nativist novel The Arch Bishop (1855) which depicts the Philadelphia riots of 1844, and tells of Irish Catholic women participating in the rioting: 'Great numbers of women now joined in the fray, and no tigress ever fought more desperately or frantically for its prey, than these did for their foreign masters..."By the Holy virgin!" they yelled, as their unbound hair streamed around their hideously distorted visages, "we will this night, wash our hands in your hearts' blood, and send

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[78] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 81.
[79] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 144, 145, 153.

every heretic soul of you to burn in purgatory!" "[80] In this extract, the fighting women are compared to wild animals; unfavourably so, it may be argued, for the tigress kills to feed her cubs, while these women are fighting for 'foreign masters.' The distortion of their womanhood wreaked by the malign influence of Catholicism and manifested in animalistic violence can be read in their 'hideously distorted visages' and heard in their 'yells.'

By contrast, the author of the novel Carlotina and the Sanfedisti (1853) views fighting women with approbation: 'It was with the intention of discovering Ciceroacchio, and fighting for him, if necessary, that the young and patriotic Roman heroines had started...under the leadership of [the heroine] Carlotina.' Of course the difference is that here the 'modern Amazonians' are fighting for republican values against the forces of Catholic despotism, rather than in support of them.[81] Additionally, this story is set in the past (c.1798-1800) rather than in contemporary times. All the same, the different attitude here to female violence is worth noting and perhaps indicates different priorities on the part of the different authors.

To return to the convent, anti-Catholics blamed monastic life for causing mental and physical illness among nuns. In The Haunted Convent (1854) the hero learns that several nuns have committed suicide: 'three nuns choked themselves to death with their garters. It's a fact. They couldn't stand the confinement, and so the poor things up and done it.'[82] Josephine Bunkley stated in 1855 that 'it is everywhere acknowledged that the life of monastic and conventual establishments is the most unfavorable to bodily health.' She claimed that 'I was told, and it was generally taught, that *consumption is a part of the*

[80] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Arch Bishop: or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855), 226. While it may seem that these women show restraint in not damning their opponents to hell, the reference to purgatory has perhaps been chosen to emphasize the women's Catholicism and to invoke a doctrine which was rejected (and often ridiculed) by Protestants.
[81] Farrenc, Carlotina and the Sanfedisti, 388.
[82] Charles Frothingham, The Convent's Doom: A Tale of Charleston in 1834: Also The Haunted Convent (Boston: Graves and Weston, 1854), 26.

vocation.' She further stated that 'I consider infirmity of body and insanity of mind the *natural results* of convent life.' Additionally, she cited the case of Olivia Neal, an 'escaped nun'; 'She is now an inmate of the asylum at Mount Hope, Baltimore, a hopeless maniac, driven to desperation by her tormentors.'[83] Sister Agnes (1854) also evoked consumption: 'When a new sister was admitted…she sank into a moving statue…or she pined away…till a hectic spot arose on her cheek, and a hollow cough denoted the disease which, ere long, carried her to the tomb.'[84]

Celibacy is no healthier for men. Nathaniel Hawthorne described Roman priests in his novel The Marble Faun (1860): 'With apparently a grosser development of animal life than most men, they were placed in an unnatural relation with women, and thereby lost the healthy, human conscience that pertains to other human beings, who own the sweet household ties connecting them with wife and daughter.'[85] Anti-Catholic texts claimed that the celibacy of the Catholic priesthood engendered a sinister and twisted misogyny. In Modern Pilgrims (1855) the traveler, Annie, feels offended by a priest's behaviour to her; 'she was piqued with his manner, as expressive of his aversion to herself as a woman; just as if she were a basilisk, or as she could wish to inspire him with a sentiment a saint might not welcome to his soul. She felt her pride touched by his keeping his eyes upon the carpet, as if it were a silent insult.'[86]

The Huguenot Exiles (1856) depicted a priest, Father Antoine, condemning women, somewhat hysterically: 'Lovely phantoms! creatures of impulse given to man for

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[83] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 216, 91, 186, 42. The case of Olevia Neal , who allegedly escaped from a convent in Baltimore, was first publicized in 1839 in the Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine and was subsequently described in the Review of the Case of Olevia Neal, the Carmelite Nun, Commonly Called Sister Isabella (pamphlet published without publisher name, place or date; probably published in Baltimore in 1839.) She is also mentioned in Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 41, 300-302.
[84] Sister Agnes, 193-194.
[85] Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun: or, The Romance of Monte Beni (New York: Penguin, 1990 [1860]), 412.
[86] Wood, Modern Pilgrims, I 260.

his torment! I repudiate ye all.'[87] In this interpretation, the monk's self-imposed celibacy has warped his view of women and caused him to develop an unhealthy image of women as temptresses – and as having been created as such by God, a belief that would be at odds with a more conventional interpretation of the creation. This passage does not argue that Catholicism actually taught this doctrine, but that the celibate life of a priest has an unhealthy and distorting effect. The novel Madelon Hawley (1857) depicted a priest who tells another carelessly that 'Women generally are rather weak-minded.'[88] Of course, many Protestant men and women believed something similar, but this particular novel intended to evoke disagreement.

The convent narratives viewed independent women, not accountable to a husband or father, equivocally. Their very independence questioned their virtue; by what means could they have gained this freedom? Nancy Lusignan Schultz argues that the members of the mob which burned the Ursuline convent at Charlestown in 1834 were aggrieved by the apparent prosperity of their neighbours which served to suggest the ascendancy of independent women: 'the relatively opulent life style of their new Roman Catholic neighbors, foreigners and – worse – *women*, was a source of irritation.'[89] She views the extreme action taken by this group as evidence of their fear of the power wielded by transgressive women. She locates the transgression primarily in the assertiveness of the Mother Superior, Madame St George, and believes that 'Mother Superiors in positions of authority were the most vilified figures in convent captivity narratives and in the historical documents relating to the Charlestown convent burning.'[90] John R. Buzzell, one of the leaders of the mob which burned the Ursuline

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[87] Dupuy, The Huguenot Exiles, 79.
[88] Binder, Madelon Hawley, 51.
[89] Nancy Lusignan Schultz, Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834 (New York, The Free Press, 2000), 47.
[90] Schultz, 'Introduction', Veil of Fear, xxxviii.

Convent at Charlestown in 1834, testified at his trial that the Superior of the convent, Sister St. George, was 'the sauciest woman I ever heard talk.'[91] Sister St. George had attained a social standing and authority as a result of her monastic career, according to Nancy Lusignan Schultz, that would have been impossible otherwise: 'in the antebellum United States, there would have been no other route outside the convent for a woman to achieve a comparable authority.'[92] Anti-convent activists condemned Catholicism, not merely for enslaving women, but for granting certain women authority they were not equipped to wield justly. While this may appear to be contradictory, these are actually two sides of the paternalistic and patriarchal view of womanhood taken by the convent narratives.

The authors of the convent narratives believed that Roman Catholicism posed distinctive threats to women, to family life, and by extension to the well-being of the nation, as a result of its very nature. These authors did not view Catholicism merely as a religion at odds with their own theology. They believed that Roman doctrine and practice countenanced practices and activities which were evil in their own right and which could potentially devastate the happiness and virtue of American family life, and, in turn, the virtue and safety of the American nation.

Women and sexuality

The authors of the convent narratives, in common with most reformers, wanted to prevent sexual licence on religious and social grounds, believing it caused misery and degradation. They feared that their opponents were fostering immorality and thereby

[91] Quoted in Schultz, Fire & Roses, 5. 'Sauciest' is defined by Webster's Dictionary as 'impertinently bold and flippant' and dates from 1508.
[92] Schultz, Fire & Roses, 18.

weakening marriage. These reformers did not believe that sexual behaviour was simply a matter of individual morality, but that it was also an issue of public concern because of its consequences for family life. Anti-Catholic writers manifested their concerns within the pages of the convent narratives, where they used the ancient and familiar tropes of priestly lust to uphold their own political and social views.

Some of the convent narratives make only oblique references to sexual immorality, while others were more explicit in their claims. In the 1830s the latter were usually works which claimed to be true accounts, notably George Bourne's novel Lorette (1833) and Maria Monk's notorious Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery (1836), and the exposé of priests in Cuba, Rosamond Culbertson (1836), and which expressed horror at infamies they described in loving detail.[93] In the 1850s and 1860s, the 'true' accounts displayed greater circumspection and sensationalism was more evident in the novels of novelists like Ned Buntline and Eliza Dupuy. Such works adopted a near-pornographic tone in describing violent and sexual abuse of women, both as a means of stimulating sales – there was clearly a market for works of this nature – and, possibly, because the authors simply enjoyed describing such scenes.[94] The shift from the comparative openness of the 1830s to the 1850s, in which there was a clear division between circumspect 'respectable' texts and sensationalist popular ones, suggests that ideals of feminine purity had become more inflexible in this period.

Convent narratives depicted female sexuality as destructive of family, religion and self-respect. Orvilla Belisle, the author of the anti-Catholic novel The Arch Bishop (1855), described the devastating effects of immorality in the same year, in her anti-Mormon novel, The Prophets:

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[93] See 'Rosamond Culbertson', Rosamond Culbertson, ed. Samuel B. Smith (New York: Lord, Leavitt & Co., 1836).

[94] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun; Eliza Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage: A True Romance of New York Life (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, c.1853.)

> There is a chord in the female heart which vibrates only to a like chord in a sister's heart. A look or tone may call it into action, if it comes from one of the same degree of purity as that of its own, but otherwise it slumbers in the heart dormant for ever. A fallen sister has no power over it, nor does this chord ever vibrate in her own heart, for it is snapped in twain with the departure of her purity. It is this that makes her, once fallen, fallen for ever, and expels her from the presence of the good and the pure.[95]

In the convent narratives, the 'fallen' woman irrevocably loses her femininity as a result of her transgression, even if it is involuntary. The protagonist of Charles Frothingham's story Six Hours in a Convent (1855) decides conditionally to marry the nun Maria Page: 'I swear that I will, if she is as pure as when she entered the convent.'[96] Presumably if she has been unfortunate enough to be raped while imprisoned in the convent he will consider himself excused from his vow; forced seduction is no excuse, as the victim is as 'fallen' as any prostitute, and as ineligible for a respectable marriage. Another novel, The Sisters of Soleure (by Caroline Snowden Whitmarsh, 1860), describes the grief of the character Count Julien on learning that his daughter is in danger from a villainous and lecherous Archbishop: 'My lamb – my sweet lamb, in his hands. Better, far better, have sold her to the Turks.'[97] The character of Blanco in Modern Pilgrims (1855) says of his sister 'let her die a holy virgin, rather than live to be polluted by Father Geriot.'[98] The narrator of Edward Goodwin's novel Lily White (1858) likewise suggests that death is better than dishonour:

> Thus did those two holy men make a jovial matter of a step that was to rob Lily of her liberty and subject her to the control and influence of a man whose garb bespoke the minister of God, but whose actions and conversation indicated the hypocrite and sensualist. Better, by far, for Lily had she died in the purity and innocence of childhood![99]

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[95] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Prophets; or, Mormonism Unveiled (Philadelphia, Wm White Smith, 1855), 166-167.
[96] Charles Frothingham, Six Hours in a Convent; or, The Stolen Nuns! (Boston: Graves & Weston, 1855), 34.
[97] Caroline Snowden Whitmarsh, The Sisters of Soleure: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century **(**Concord, Edson C. Eastman, 1860), 218.
[98] Wood, Modern Pilgrims, II 142.
[99] Edward Goodwin, Lily White: A Romance, Philadelphia (J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1858), 159.

According to these writers, female virtue was vulnerable to male aggression; a woman could lead the most blameless life possible but still lose her 'virtue' by being assaulted, never to regain it. For this reason these texts depicted death as a preferable fate.

In a few cases 'fallen' women in these texts are rehabilitated, but more often they are unredeemed and condemned to insanity, poverty or death. They have lost what makes them feminine, even human. In Carlotina and the Sanfedisti (1853), the ex-priest Forli compares the wicked Signora Savini, whose crimes include adultery, perverting an innocent girl, and conspiring with priests against the forces of republicanism, to an animal:

> The reptile stealthily creeping in the dark, and biting to kill, is not a human being – it is a monster, a *lapsus naturæ* – one of the exceptions begotten by the fiend, and carrying like him, evils around it. Don't speak any more of wife! A woman is a lovely being…This creature has lost her title to such a name. She is not…no! she cannot be a woman!

Signora Savini's infamy is almost contagious; 'a wide circle was formed around the wretched creature. No one dared to venture near her, as if in dread of being contaminated.'[100]

Women are not just liable to 'fall' but are also, like Savini, agents of seduction. Carlotina and the Sanfedisti takes place in Italy and depicts a power struggle between the forces of the papacy and liberalism. The scheming Signora Savini instructs the heroine, Carlotina, to surrender her virginity to the hero, Adrian, in order to learn the secrets of the liberal movement. Signora Savini tells Carlotina that her religion requires this ultimate sacrifice: 'Truth, concerning him, must be known, cost what it may. On that condition alone can you save your soul from hell; and as your soul is still more precious to you than your honor, sacrifice your honor rather than endanger your soul.' This stands in direct opposition to the 'respectable' belief that death would be preferable

[100] Farrenc, Carlotina and the Sanfedisti, 387, 404.

to dishonor. The offence is made worse as Signora Savini is 'one [Carlotina] used to regard as a protectress, and to cherish as a mother.'[101] The device of the mother figure acting as a procuress appears to be influenced by pornographic works of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For a mother figure to incite a young girl to vice was seen in these texts as a betrayal and is also a perversion of the maternal role which was so celebrated in nineteenth century America. Such behaviour was, though, seen as an inevitable consequence of seduction; William Sanger wrote in his History of Prostitution (1858) that 'once seduced, of course the female becomes herself the seducer of the inexperienced.'[102]

The convent narratives, and indeed reforming literature as a whole, suggested that women were always in danger from immoral hypocrites and their wiles. In the British narrative Personal Experiences of Roman Catholicism (1864), Eliza Richardson described the priest who converted her; 'the priest judiciously suited his plan of treatment to the tone of his visitor's mind, reasoning when reasoning was needed, and strengthening when courage and strength were required.'[103] Convent narratives depicted Catholicism as a system in which women's weakness was cultivated and exploited. This was a constant from the 1830s onwards. In 1833 the novel Lorette depicted women who have been corrupted by the Roman Catholic system: 'At the house where I was sent, were two females, adepts in every species of vice…When they were alone with me and the priest, every attempt was made to induce me to join in their disgusting familiarities with him.' The novel portrayed this as learned and conditioned behaviour: 'the selected girls were made eye-witnesses of the familiarities between the Jesuit priests

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[101] Farrenc, Carlotina and the Sanfedisti, 108.
[102] Sanger, The History of Prostitution, 321.
[103] Eliza Richardson, Personal Experiences of Roman Catholicism: with Incidents of Convent Life (London: Morgan and Scott, 1864), 30.

and the nuns, until they were duly trained to join the vile association.'[104] In the summer of 1834, a year later, a handbill circulated in the days before the burning of the Ursuline convent at Charlestown condemned it as 'that curst nunnery that prostitutes female virtue and liberty under the garb of holy religion' and claimed that 'when Bonaparte opened the nunneries in Europe, he found crowds of infant skulls!'[105]

These ideas persisted throughout the 1850s, and not merely in the United States: in 1852 the British anti-convent pamphleteer Reverend M. Hobart Seymour described European nuns as having 'lived with their confessors more familiarly than married women with their husbands.'[106] The Truckman, a character in The Convent's Doom by Charles Frothingham (1854), talks of his sister who has entered a convent and his assumption that she would be 'ruined': 'I determined the next day to apply to the authorities to recover her, although I hardly expected she would be as pure as when she left her home; but I still loved her, and love her yet.'[107] In the following year Josephine Bunkley wrote of her experience in a convent:

> The priest...can either take advantage of...confession or not, as he may feel inclined...should his own evil heart suggest to him the moral destruction of [a] sister, how great the advantage he possesses for its accomplishment, in view of this doctrine of passive and meritorious obedience...As a result of these pernicious and utterly demoralizing doctrines, a lamentable state of things, I grieve to say, existed among a portion of the community at St Joseph's.[108]

Anti-convent texts invoked the image of sexual seduction when describing the spiritual seductiveness of Catholicism. The City Side (1854) features an episode in which a nun escapes from a convent. In telling her story, she describes being literally

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[104] George Bourne, Lorette (Edinburgh, Waugh & Innes, 1836 [1833]), 33, 138.
[105] Quoted in Schultz, Fire & Roses, 161. The image of Napoleon as liberating the victims of Catholicism is echoed in Edgar Allan Poe's story 'The Pit and the Pendulum' (1842).
[106] Rev. M. Hobart Seymour, Convents or Nunneries: A Lecture in Reply to Cardinal Wiseman (Bath, R.E. Peach, 1852), 5.
[107] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 13.
[108] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 135, 136, 138.

seduced into Roman Catholicism; this nun's 'fall' from Protestantism to Catholicism is inextricably linked with her sexual 'fall.'

> The next night Father Fitzhazel came again, and seemed determined to follow up his advantage; and, when he left me, I was committed to the church. I need not tell – I should blush to tell – the means he used, and how I wronged myself. Enough to say I had taken a fearful leap, and could not return. I was not what I was before. The caresses of the priest had accomplished what his argument had failed to accomplish.'[109]

This extract makes explicit the implied link between the seduction of the body and the seduction of the soul. The Roman Catholic Church is here responsible equally for both.

The importance of the family is underlined by the underlying 'moral reform' or anti-prostitution agenda found in several of these texts. This campaign concentrated on shaming men and rehabilitating prostitutes. Nancy F. Cott has characterized the moral reform movement as 'one response to the growing social and sexual distance that working-class women…were traveling from patriarchal regulation,' in other words as an expression of anxiety over the empowerment and liberation of working-class women from social norms, implying a recognition of the potential power and influence of independent and socially mobile women.[110] However, it appears that the movement proved an opportunity to voice criticisms and frustrations with the existing state of gender relations, centred as it was on an issue that was relatively noncontroversial – all 'respectable' men and women agreed that prostitution was wrong. The moral reform movement attacked, not just vice, but also the 'double standard' by society judged women more harshly than men for sexual immorality. This subtext embodies the convent narratives' belief in the family as a bastion of republicanism.

Signora Savini attacks the 'double standard' in the novel Carlotina and the Sanfedisti (1853):

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[109] Belmont, The City Side, 215.
[110] Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 239.

> Two persons are in a room, the one is a man, and the other a woman; the lover and his mistress…the world will place the stamp of infamy on the forehead of the woman, and exalt the vanity of the man, by envying him his fate…this monstrous difference, this inequality…spreads a blemish upon the reputation of women, and makes the man proud and arrogant for the same guilt.[111]

Savini, although a villain, is clearly speaking for the author when she attacks immoral men, and her views echo those found in other moral reform texts. The author of Female Depravity asked in 1857 'Why should a woman, when she has fallen from that virtue her sex so highly prizes, and justly too, be treated with such scorn and contempt when a man equally guilty and often more so, passes as a respectable member of society?'[112] The prostitute Clara reforms a former client by her impassioned attack on the double standard: 'O yes, it is the easiest thing in the world for [men] to reform; but we, poor creatures, because we have once fallen, must forever lie there! Out upon such nonsense! I will show the world that such a doctrine is false.'[113]

Such attacks on masculine hypocrisy are very far from submissive. Women who were involved in the moral reform movement were themselves criticized for being 'unwomanly' and for leaving their correct sphere. They argued, however, that true womanhood required them to defend the family as an institution and to protect their sons and daughters from immorality. For these women, and by implication for the anti-convent writers who wrote on the subject, the defence of the home and family sometimes outweighed 'modesty' and submission.

This is not to say that submission to the ideals of marriage and family was not important. Female characters suffered if they rejected these institutions. Alonzo Carleton, a character in Danger in the Dark (1854), is a 'hero' whose love for his fiancée

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[111] Farrenc, Carlotina and the Sanfedisti, 334-335.
[112] Osgood Bradbury, Female Depravity; or, the House of Death (New York: Robert M. De Witt, 1857), 34.
[113] Bradbury, Female Depravity, 73, 100.

is conditional on her perfect behaviour; once she has been enticed into a convent he rejects her. He blames his subsequent decline into intemperance (which he overcomes rapidly and easily) on this disappointment:

> He felt, keenly felt, and could not help but feel, that she had illy requited his ardent love, and been the cause of his falling into profligate and dissipated habits. He entertained too, some secret fear that the mischievous and infatuating errors of Romanism had produced a lasting deleterious effect, and left a canker in her soul, from which she might never recover.[114]

There is no evidence for this canker in the unfortunate Isadora except that she suffers fits of madness in the convent which appear to abate once she escapes (simply by walking out of the door), and Carleton goes on to wed another girl who is also an escapee of the convent. (Unlike Isadora, this second girl has not been manipulated into rejecting a fiancé, which may, in some obscure way, explain why Carleton accepts her. The tale is not notable for its internal logic.) The story today reads like a callous abandonment, but readers are clearly expected to approve of Carleton's decision, and to deprecate Isadora for failing to uphold standards of feminine behaviour – an instance of a 'fall' that is not sexual but which is equally devastating.

The convent narratives were clearly afraid of both the sexual violation of American women, and the destructive power of female sexuality. Other 'anti' writers identified similar threats elsewhere. In 1829 the communitarian Fanny Wright had been roundly abused for her radical views on marriage and sexuality, by the editor William Leete Stone, a well-known anti-Catholic, later famous for discrediting Maria Monk's narrative:

> She recommends the encouragement of early prostitution, and contemns and discards altogether the marriage contract and in effect recommends transforming this glorious world…into one vast immeasurable brothel;

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[114] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 219.

> and concludes by anticipating the blending of the black and white population, as the social millenium.'[115]

Stone is here both criticizing a reformer – Fanny Wright was involved in numerous radical reforming movements – and adopting an 'anti' attitude which aligned him with the anti-convent writers he exposed. All the convent writers and the vast majority of the reformers shared his view of sexuality outside marriage. Other communitarian movements were attacked on similar grounds. Of the Fourierists, Henry J. Raymond wrote in 1846

> Fourierism is either communism with all its moral horrors, or it is only a new and cheap disguise for the familiar capitalistic system. If the 'passions' are free, as the scheme proposes, the result will be polygamy and other perversions destroying the family.[116]

The Indiana Journal had claimed of Owenite communitarians in 1826 that 'It would be no breach of charity to class them all with whores and whoremongers, nor to say that the whole group will constitute one great brothel.'[117] The closed nature of some of these communities invited comparison with the convent. According to Muncy, 'Utopian communities were accused of every conceivable sexual deviation… Visitors, both foreign and domestic, exhibited a mania for prying into the cloistered affairs of the utopias, and often carried away frightful tales of degenerate activities.'[118] The novel Modern Pilgrims (1855) quoted the following article to convince its readers of the threat posed by unconventional communities:

> THE 'ANTHROPOLOGI;' OR, CERESCO FREE-LOVE UNION
> *From the Oshkosh* (Wisconsin) *Courier*

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[115] New York Commercial Advertiser, 20 January 1829, quoted in Celia Morris Eckhardt, Fanny Wright: Rebel in America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 187.
[116] New York Tribune, Nov. 20 1846, quoted in Raymond Lee Muncy, Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities: 19th Century America (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1973), 71. Horace Greeley, an early supporter of Fourierism, had challenged Raymond to a debate on the subject, hence his writing in the Tribune; see Muncy, 71.
[117] Indiana Journal, Nov. 14 1826, quoted in Arthur Euguene Bestor, Jr., Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), 223.
[118] Muncy, Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities, 197.

> Ceresco – Hitherto unknown to fame, the locality seems destined to become suddenly famous, as the location of those modern 'Socialist' establishments of the silver sort, which sometimes lead us to doubt whether there is in man the most of the brute, the idiot, or the demon.
>
> The doctrines of the 'Union' were proven to be of the most vile and most disorganizing character, having apparently but one common basis, the lowest sensuality.[119]

Mormon Wives (1856) blames the literature of such communities for the moral decline of one young convert to Mormonism, Sarah:

> At this time – most sadly, most unfortunately – there came into her hands some of the books and papers which are now being sown broad-cast over our land, and which, wherever their doctrines have taken root, have cursed the ground with thistles and thorns, instead of blessing it with the lilies and roses of purity and love. She read about "Free-Love" and "Psychological Twinships," "Passional Attractions[120]," etc., etc., - all made enticing by fair and proper language, and not seldom invested with the glory and fascination of genius.[121]

Reforming writers accused Mormon leaders, like Catholic priests, of using sophisticated techniques to ensnare, manipulate, and seduce innocent women, as demonstrated in this extract from Female Life Among the Mormons, published in the same year:

> [Joseph Smith] exerted a mystical magical influence over me – a sort of sorcery that deprived me of the unrestricted exercise of free will. It never entered into my brain that he could cherish impure motives; that one professing such sainted holiness could seek the gratification of lawless passions. No friendly voice was near to warn me, and I fell.[122]

This recalls Modern Pilgrims, where Adelaide, an heiress, is seduced into joining the Phalanstery:

> She had been inveigled by the count and Consuelo, during their brief visit in May, to unite herself with the Phalanx. Her fancy had been addressed; and, as she would soon be of age, every attention was paid her, during their stay, to induce her to come with them. Her guardian

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[119] Wood, Modern Pilgrims II, 392.
[120] A Fourierist term.
[121] Victor, Mormon Wives, 139.
[122] Maria Ward, Female Life Among the Mormons, 65, quoted in Charles A. Cannon, 'The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign Against Mormon Polygamy', Pacific Historical Review 43 (1974), 81.

> had refused his consent; but, like a girl, as she was, whose parents were dead, and whose fortune was within a few months to be in her own control, she had mysteriously disappeared, and, with the connivance of the count, was brought out to the Phalanstery.[123]

Critics attacked Mormonism on the grounds that it fostered immorality. The Mormon practice of polygamy was the subject of bitter hostility. The 'Report to the Cincinnati Methodist Conference,' held in 1884 but similar in tone to earlier denunciations, claimed that 'Mormonism is not a religion. It is a crime…It is not a religious superstition but a system of masked sensuality, and hence subversive of every principle of morality, and abhorrent to every feeling of virtue."[124] Slavery was similarly believed to encourage sexual immorality. For example, Henry C. Wright called South Carolina 'one great legalized and baptized brothel.'[125] The Reverend Smith H. Platt sarcastically implied, almost certainly accurately, that slaves were being 'bred' by lecherous slaveowners:

> A strange bleaching process was going on in the somewhat numerous children of the plantation-slaves. They – particularly the children of the younger mothers – were a great part of them mulattoes, or quadroons, according as the mothers were black or mulattoes; and as the value of the children increased in the ratio of their whiteness, the *master, of course*, would not trouble himself to ascertain the cause.[126]

This section has demonstrated that the authors of the convent narratives were alarmed by the threats they perceived Catholicism and convents posing to female chastity. Immorality within convent walls was, these writers believed, an abomination in its own right, but it also presented a threat to the political and social power structures of the republic. These writers, like other reforming campaigners, feared that sexual

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123 Wood, Modern Pilgrims, I 327.
124 'Report to Cincinnati Methodist Conference, 1884', quoted in Cannon, 'The Awesome Power of Sex', 65.
125 'Letter from H.C. Wright', Liberator (January 29, 1858), quoted in Kristin Hoganson, 'Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860', American Quarterly 45:4 (1993), 571.
126 Smith H. Platt, The Martyrs, and The Fugitive; or, A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Death of an African Family, and the Slavery and Escape of the Their Son (New York: Daniel Fanshaw, 1859), 66.

violation of American women was symbolic of political violation of American republican ideals.

Women, writing and reforming

This section will examine the attitudes found in convent narratives towards women's involvement in writing and reforming. Women grew increasingly important in these fields as the nineteenth century progressed. Women's influence in reform movements, whether as leaders or as supporters, was vital to their expansion, and was often closely linked to the growing phenomenon of women writers. The best-selling books in the United States (excepting the Bible) were in the main written by (or 'written by') women. These trends were important in the development of the convent narrative genre. But they also presented questions about the extent to which women could write, or reform, while preserving their respectable position in the domestic sphere. The convent narratives give a valuable perspective on this aspect of 'womanhood' in the nineteenth century.

In 1850, the United States was still feeling the reverberations from the Second Great Awakening. Revivalism had encouraged Christians to believe in the power of their own agency, and to seek to lead others to salvation. The resulting expansion of Protestant sects included many of the creators and co-creators of the anti-Catholic narratives, including the ministers Thomas Ford Caldicott, a Baptist (Hannah Corcoran, 1853) and Hiram Mattison, a Methodist (The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, 1868.) This evangelism was also reflected in the surge in reforming activity at this time, which was closely related to the genre.

The movements that came together to form the Second Great Awakening appear to have been particularly appealing to women. Women in these groups were encouraged to experience an emotional connection to the divine. While traditional Protestantism did not by any means exclude emotionalism, it did prioritize knowledge and understanding of the Bible and a reasoned approach to theology exemplified by the minister's rigidly structured sermon. This naturally empowered those men who had access to secondary and university education, and disempowered women, who were far less likely to receive it. The new evangelical movements appealed to people who found in them something they did not experience in traditional religion – a combination of emotional release, the shock of the new, the social opportunities given by the camp meeting and, not least, a whole new relationship with God. Women were well represented in the ranks of those who adopted evangelicalism.

Traditional religion, it has been argued, was also strongly influenced by women at this time. The Feminization of American Culture by Ann Douglas (1977) offered an interpretation of American popular religion in the mid-nineteenth century in which piety became aligned with femininity, beginning in the late 1820s and early 1830s, as ministers and churches lost political influence and men, she believed, became less interested in spirituality. Women became so associated with religion that the ideal woman assumed many of the functions of the ministry; Douglas describes the archetypal heroine of the nineteenth century American sentimental novel as an 'amateur minister handily outdoing her established clerical competitors.'[127] This ideal of ministry was directly linked to the Second Great Awakening and its stress on individual agency in seeking personal salvation and the salvation of others. This ministry is seen at work in the anti-Catholic novel Inez: A Tale of the Alamo (1855) by Augusta Jane Evans; its heroine,

[127] Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture, 6, 157.

Mary, engages in dialogue with her friend Florence, who is wavering between Protestantism and Catholicism. In the space of a few pages, Mary uses the arguments of St Augustine, Claud of Turin, Paulinus and Ambrose, and does not omit to condemn English Puseyism - a formidable range of theological sources for a young girl living in rural Texas.[128] The convent narratives, however, did not tend to depict such characters; they describe young women who are without guidance and who are easily manipulated into error. These texts do substantiate the ideal of the evangelical woman, however, in that they present cautionary tales against spiritual passivity.

The rôle of women in nurturing and influencing children was linked to a wider calling, that of helping the more unfortunate members of society who lacked their own virtuous family network. This was not new, but was given a new emphasis in the nineteenth century in the context of proliferating reform movements. Writers exhorted women to use their influence to help, not just their own children, but others, including needy Catholic immigrants. The Preface to The Convent and the Manse (1853) made an explicit plea to women as influencers: 'Christians! Christian *women! let* not the cause of the Burman, the Hindoo, or the distant Islander, claim all your love, or steal away your pity from the 'Greeks' [a term for Irish immigrants] at your door and in your households.'[129]

Women were closely associated with the work of a range of reforming associations, and the popular writing of this period frequently praised and encouraged this. George Bourne, who was involved in the Maria Monk affair but who was better known as anti-slavery activist, wrote of Northern women that 'they must take up arms, which they can wield with more success than men, and urge Southern women to join

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[128] Augusta Jane Evans, Inez: A Tale of the Alamo (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1855), 120-121, 147-148.
[129] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, iv.

them.'[130] Three years later Bourne affirmed that 'the abolition of slavery in America is emphatically the duty and privilege of women.'[131] However, there seems to have been a degree of ambiguity about this role. These societies existed, after all, in order to bring about social change and their activities may have come uncomfortably close to political involvement for some male (and female) observers. The issue of women's place in politics split the anti-slavery movement in 1840 between those who objected to women speaking to mixed-gender public meetings and those who accepted, and even embraced it. Many women who raised their voices in unpopular causes were treated with a contempt which was associated with their perceived abandonment of their feminine role. For example, the proslavery writer George Frederick Holmes described Harriet Beecher Stowe as a 'termagant virago' and 'foul-mouthed hag' who had 'wantonly forfeited her privileges of immunity' as a lady.[132]

Carol Lasser's theory of 'voyeuristic abolitionism' is of interest here. She argues that 'before the distinctions between men's and women's roles within the [anti-slavery] movement had become firmly drawn, writers of both sexes used highly sexualized formulations to recruit women to the cause.' In succeeding years, as participants in the movement came to conform more to gender norms of activism, she argues that 'both the language of voyeuristic abolitionism and the mobilization of women around the highly sexualized content of the rhetoric that had, in the 1830s, helped rally them to the cause, receded.'[133] She argues that voyeuristic abolition was at its height between 1834 and 1839 with its peak in 1836, and then declined with brief resurgences in 1849 and

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[130] George Bourne, Picture of Slavery in the United States of America (Middletown, CT, 1834), 98, quoted in Carol Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric', Journal of the Early Republic 28 (Spring 2008), 83.
[131] George Bourne, Slavery Illustrated in its Effects Upon Women and Domestic Society (Boston, 1837), vii, quoted in Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism', 85.
[132] George Frederick Holmes, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', Southern Literary Messenger 18:12 (12 December 1852), 722.
[133] Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism', 91, 92

1858. The early period closely resembles the prevalence of anti-Catholic and anti-convent discourse, while the later peaks coincide with periods of anti-Catholic agitation, most marked in the 1850s. Lasser suggests that voyeuristic abolitionism's 'provocative character raised questions about gendered respectability that both clarified and deepened the fault lines within the sometimes fragile antislavery alliance.'[134]

Lasser argues that 'deployed in the service of a moral cause, women's sexual knowledge of, and participation as spectators in, the erotic dimension of antislavery literature challenged established gender norms for women.'[135] This mirrors the anti-convent narratives of the 1830s and their frank depiction of sexual abuse. Such depictions are absent from the 'true life' accounts of the 1850s and are restricted to the more lurid novels like Ned Buntline's The Beautiful Nun. This suggests it had become unacceptable for a respectable woman to discuss these themes by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Female social reformers, sympathetic or otherwise, are conspicuously absent from most of the convent narratives, which may suggest that their authors did not favour women's participation in organized social reform. The anti-Catholic novel Modern Pilgrims (1855) is critical of benevolent societies and their members:

> Ladies in the fashionable and endowed circles…found it was their hard lot to fight day by day with *ennui*…It was treated in different ways, though the most usual was by membership of beneficent societies, of which there was every variety...These ladies…so lazily occupied in upholding these charities, never once asked, Can the fountain of all this wretchedness be reached? Can we not better labor to prevent misery, than to lessen its sufferings?[136]

Many of the women who were involved in writing these narratives appear to have felt the need to justify their incursion into the public sphere. Most of those

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[134] Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism', 100.
[135] Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism', 98.
[136] Wood, Modern Pilgrims, II 218,223.

women whose opinions on femininity have been recorded earned their living by writing. However, they clearly felt the need to excuse the venture into the public domain represented by publication. These women writers tended to state that they wrote in order to support themselves in order to justify an activity that could be seen as insufficiently unassuming. Sarah Josepha Hale justified female authorship on these grounds:

> It is only in emergencies, in cases where duty demands the sacrifice of female sensitiveness, that a lady of sense and delicacy will come before the public, in a manner to make herself conspicuous. There is little danger that such a one will be arrogant in her pretension. These remarks may be considered as allusions to our own case.[137]

Many female authors wrote under pseudonyms or anonymously. Mary Kelley interprets such authorship as making a statement about the role of women. She argues that 'to be secret writers was in a sense to state that they were not writers at all. It was to testify to an implicit recognition of wrongdoing, of guilt, perhaps of shame…for these writers, anonymity related more to a state of mind than a state of reality.'[138] According to Carol Lasser, male and female anti-slavery authors of the 1830s 'self-consciously and preemptively defended themselves, admitting that they challenged the boundaries of acceptance, but excusing their excesses by claiming that they were not seeking the emotional engagement of the audience for lascivious purposes but in the project of destroying slavery.'[139]

The convent narratives contained similar disclaimers. In these texts, the authors – real or supposed – were careful to emphasize (or have emphasized on their behalf by 'editors') that they were merely writing in order to bring alleged Catholic abuses to light and to offer a warning to other women. For example, the pseudonymous author of The

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[137] Quoted in Ann D. Wood, 'The "Scribbling Women" and Fanny Fern: Why Women Wrote', American Quarterly 23:1 (Spring 1971), 3-24, 10.
[138] Kelley, Private Woman, Public Stage, 128.
[139] Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism', 93-94.

Convent and the Manse (1853) stated (using a de-personalizing first-person plural) that 'Our simple object is to lift a voice of warning, and to show the contrast between the pure and peaceable religion of Christ and that system which is its dangerous counterfeit.'[140] The 'clergywoman's widow' who wrote Sister Agnes was self-effacing, not only in choosing to publish anonymously, but also in the humble description of the novel as a 'little work' (of 412 pages!) The author stated that 'it is in the desire of inducing some to pause before they enter a prison – of all prisons the most hopeless – that [the novel] is set forth.'[141] The editor of Miss Bunkley's Book: The Testimony of an Escaped Novice (1855) described Binkley's motivations in similar terms:

> Shortly after Miss Bunkley had escaped from St. Joseph's…the Superior of that convent published a defamatory letter against her. This decided Miss Bunkley not only to defend herself, but also to give an exhibition of convent life, as it had come under her observation, for the information and warning of her American countrymen:…[she] availed herself of the advice of judicious friends, who believed that it was a sacred duty to the American community and the best interests of society to do so.[142]

The work of writing a convent narrative could itself be regarded as an act of ministry. In these texts, nuns who successfully escape the clutches of the convent invariably embrace Protestantism and are thus redeemed of their folly in being entrapped by Catholicism. The nun in the novel The City Side (1854) is converted in this manner; 'During her incarceration Nell Crowninshield had indeed become a Christian. The tyranny and corruption, the duplicity and cruelty, of the Catholic church, had led her to the Lord Jesus Christ as her Saviour.'[143] The creation of the convent narrative, while a potentially dubious activity for a lady (as suggested by the numerous

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[140] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, iii.
[141] Sister Agnes, 3.
[142] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, ix. The Superior's letter was sent to 'The Editor of the Citizen' and was dated 1 December 1854. This may refer to the Frederick Citizen, also known as the New Citizen and Republican Citizen; Frederick is about twenty miles from Emmitsburg and so it is plausible that it might have covered the controversy. The letter was reproduced in Miss Bunkley's Book, 247-252.
[143] Belmont, The City Side, 256.

disclaimers and justifications included by their authors) was cast as a pious act, illustrating the contradictions inherent in 'true womanhood.'

The authors of convent narratives were conscious that a woman 'speaking' publicly through the publication of her story was liable to meet with suspicion if not outright hostility. The pains these writers took to justify entering the public sphere demonstrate this. They even turned such suspicions to their own account; the seriousness of the Roman Catholic threat was actually emphasized by the willingness of female victims to publicize their experiences in spite of prevailing moral codes. The insistence in these texts on the respectability of the women involved, and their acceptance of the prevailing tenets of feminine behaviour, suggests that these writers were not willing to adopt the more militant approach of the moral reformers and abolitionists. Neither were they prepared to advocate any extension of women's political rights. Indeed the convent narratives rarely mention the campaign for women's rights, favourably or unfavourably, perhaps suggesting that anti-convent writers regarded women's rights activists as cranks rather than as credible campaigners.

Women and work

Both working- and middle-class women worked both in and outside the household in a range of capacities in this period. The convent narratives, however, express hostility and suspicion towards women's work outside the home. Such work went against the spirit of the 'Cult of True Womanhood' and 'Republican Motherhood' because it took women away from their family responsibilities, and because adherents of these belief systems thought the wider world had a corrupting effect on women's delicate sensibilities. However, in reality women filled a variety of roles from teaching

to industrial work, and evidence suggests that a number of them enjoyed a degree of autonomy as a result, which appears to have caused concern among observers who feared women were incapable of wielding the power conferred by independence responsibly.

Gerda Lerner argues that by 1840 'women's work outside the home no longer met with social approval...many businesses and professional occupations formerly open to women were now closed.' She claims that 'the genteel lady of fashion had become a model of American femininity, and the definition of "woman's proper sphere" seemed narrower and more confined than ever. Lerner uses the example of the professionalization of medicine and midwifery to indicate the changing nature of women's participation in the world of work. She also points out that there were fewer women involved in trade and commerce in the 1830s than in the colonial period. While women were in demand as teachers, Lerner argues this reflects women's willingness to fill the steeply rising number of vacancies caused by the expansion of education for a low wage. Lerner believes that 'in the teaching field, as…in industry…role expectations were adaptable provided the inferior status group filled a social need.'[144]

Thomas Dublin's work on women industrial workers demonstrates the permeability of barriers to women's independent existence. He states that 'the evidence strongly suggests that most young women themselves decided to work in the mills. They were generally not *sent* to the mills by their parents to supplement low family income but went of their own accord for other reasons.' Dublin notes that 'the view of women's motivations that emerges from analysis of their social origins and correspondence with their families stands in sharp contrast to contemporary offerings,

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144 Gerda Lerner, 'The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson', in Lerner, The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1979]), 18, 22, 24.

especially to the Lowell Offering' in which 'writers stressed the selfless motivations that sent women into the mills.'[145] This is reminiscent of the ways women writers justified their decisions to publish on the grounds of economic necessity or, in the case of convent narratives, on the grounds of duty. Dublin's conclusions reflect the divergence between the ideals associated with republican womanhood and true womanhood and the reality of women's lives. Women mill workers held strikes in 1834 and 1836, suggesting that the experience of working and living together encouraged solidarity and confidence in taking industrial action, placing women firmly within the political sphere. In 1834 strikers issued a statement which gave a political cast to their protest:

> Our present object is to have union and exertion, and we remain in possession of our unquestionable rights. We circulate this paper wishing to obtain the names of all who imbibe the spirit of our Patriotic Ancestors, who preferred privation to bondage, and parted with all that renders life desirable and even life itself to procure independence for their children…As we are free, we would remain in possession of what kind Providence has bestowed upon us, and remain daughters of freemen still.[146]

This statement, using similar rhetoric to that employed by male trade union members at this time, suggests the strikers linked their conditions and treatment to themes of independence and liberty and viewed them as important to the furtherance of the nation's republican future. It expresses a fear that the workers' rights are in danger of being violated and links to the 'paranoid mindset' in this respect. According to Dublin, 'for Lowell women…wage cuts were thus not questions of purely economic concern; they were interpreted more broadly, as attempts to "enslave" women workers.'[147] Connecting current grievances to the revolutionary cause was also a potent and

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[145] Thomas Dublin, Women at Work : The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 35, 39; Thomas Dublin, Transforming Women's Work : New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994)

[146] Boston Evening Transcript, 18 February 1834, quoted in Dublin, Women at Work, 93.

[147] Dublin, Women at Work, 94.

recurring technique for political campaigners which will be discussed further below (164.) The absence of women industrial workers from the convent narratives may suggest that their authors regarded such work as unfeminine, but it may also mean merely that these writers did were not concerned with them, either ideologically or as appealing subjects for popular fiction. They were concerned with upholding middle-class values, within which, as Lerner argues, 'lower-class women were simply ignored…Working women were not a fit subject for the concern of publishers and mass media writers.'[148]

Jeanne Boydston has argued that 'recent work in women's history and in labor and economic history suggest that the material condition of the transition [from the pre- to the post-revolutionary economy] may have given rise, not to the exclusion of women from the market, but to an expanded dependence on the market labor of women, performed both within and outside the household.' She argues that 'economic success became…one of the central constituting tropes of masculinity' and that 'laboring men urged their own political vision – artisan republicanism – with an emphasis on maleness that utterly obliterated the presence of women in commerce and the trades.'[149] In such a context, the prospect of the removal of women from the familial household to the convent may naturally have caused disquiet among heads of households which required the economic participation of all members, and where male status varied with an economic success that may have been dependent on female labour. Boydston argues that the ideology of labour as male developed to the extent that 'the world of labor was, by definition, a male world and females who appeared in that world were engaging in unnatural relations. The growing ideological prohibition of female exposure soon assumed a particular association with women workers, as this group became the very

[148] Lerner, 'The Lady and the Mill Girl', 25, 26.
[149] Boydston, ' The Woman Who Wasn't There', 186, 200.

embodiment of natural disorder.' She argues that, by the time the first women were starting work at the Lowell mills, 'the workplace was by definition male – not because only or mainly men inhabited it (they did not) but because femaleness had been defined successfully as absence from the work place."[150] In this interpretation, households required female labor to sustain their wealth, yet female labor was simultaneously frowned on as unfeminine and anti-family. This has implications for the convent narratives, which may have reflected hostility both to women's labor and, simultaneously, hostility to the removal of women's labor from the home to the convent.

The convent narratives criticized harshly the figure of the Mother Superior, and portrayed her in a way that suggested she had betrayed her femininity. Attacks based on her alienating independence and her career may possibly have reflected insecurities associated with the growing phenomenon of young working class women leaving home to work in factories and other industrial concerns, and middle class women finding employment as teachers, or, sometimes controversially, as professional reformers, for example anti-slavery lecturers. Mill workers at Lowell and other industrial centres left home to live institutional, single-sex lives revolving around work. The phenomenon resembled the nun's renunciation of home for a life of service and devotion passed among other women. As discussed above (114), mill workers also organized strikes and other direct protests, suggesting the capacity of women to band together to challenge necessarily male sources of authority. Thomas Dublin notes that 'mill agents assumed an attitude of benevolent paternalism towards female operatives, and they found it

[150] Boydston, ' The Woman Who Wasn't There', 205, 206.

particularly disturbing that women paid such little heed to their advice. Strikers were not simply unfeminine; they were ungrateful as well.'[151]

The convent may have seemed a possible locus for direct political or social campaigning by women. It also offered a means for dramatizing the dangers of female power and solidarity. Opponents of convents, it seems, were additionally manifesting their antagonistic reaction to women's labour outside the home.

Conclusion

The convent narratives expressed wide-ranging concerns about the role and nature of femininity in the American republic. They espoused the prevailing views of women and the role of the family, but they also contained a questioning and uncertain undercurrent which expressed the insecurities their authors felt when confronted with the rapid changes taking place nationwide. They expressed ambivalence towards the accommodations required by social, economic and religious change. This ambivalence was a result of their fearful relationship to change, which, for these authors, posed a constant threat to the revolutionary values to which they clung. While the narratives clearly subscribe to prevailing ideologies of womanhood, as delineated by Barbara Welter and Linda Kerber. they also reinforce the conclusions reached in recent historiography, to the effect that the position of women was complex and shifting, and that ideals of womanhood were sometimes contradictory and often ambiguous.

These narratives were chiefly concerned to attack Catholicism and convents. On that level they promote an ideology which criticized monasticism, arguing that convent life was unnatural and harmful to women, that they were vulnerable once

[151] Thomas Dublin, Women at Work, 92.

removed from the family embrace, and that they were at risk of mistreatment at the hands of their fellow nuns, their superiors and the Catholic clergy. These arguments were intended to discourage women from taking the veil, and to warn parents and guardians of the dangers their charges would face.

On another level, and paradoxically, for texts promoting the values of the American Revolution, the narratives were concerned to uphold and sustain the social, political and economic status quo. This established system faced new threats in the United States in the antebellum period. Economic changes, sectional differences, religious and political controversy and extensive immigration all caused great changes in American society. The narratives used their portrayals of women and their strong authorial voices to bolster the social opinions held by their authors.

The narratives promote a complex of values which they connected to true femininity and the ideal family and which upheld their world view. In religious terms, women were to take an active part in spiritual affairs and to provide a moral example. Politically, women were to inculcate republican values in their children. Economically, women were encouraged to be homemakers and to consume manufactured goods in greater quantities. Socially, the narratives are approving of individual 'good works' among the monetarily and financially impoverished, but are by and large critical of organized community based reform societies which involved women working together outside male supervision.

In all these ways and more, the convent narratives promoted an agenda of femininity and family which generally accorded with the dominant paradigms of the time but which was specifically tailored to the beliefs and needs of their authors. They are hugely valuable sources for women's history; at the same time the study of women's

history in this period enhances our understanding of the narratives and the anti-Catholic movement as a whole.

Chapter 4: Immigration and economic change in the convent narrative

This study, having argued that the American convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s manifested deep-seated fears about safety of the republic which were expressed in concerns over the role of women, will now address the themes of immigration, economic change and urbanization. This chapter will examine the relationship between these developments and the fears of anti-republican conspiracy found in the convent narratives.

The first section will discuss the representation of immigration in the convent narratives. Immigration and nativism were closely linked, and the authors of the convent narratives devoted much attention to the problems which they associated with immigrants. They raised various issues in relation to these problems. The most urgent questions for these authors, though, concerned the ways in which immigration affected American political and social institutions.

This chapter will then turn to the relationship between the convent narratives and the economic changes which affected the United States between 1776 and 1870. The authors of the convent narratives manifested their own economic preoccupations within the pages of their texts. Their depictions of capitalism and industrialization will be analysed to reveal the connections between these economic phenomena and the political and religious concerns discussed above. The discussion will then turn to an examination of urbanization, and the ways in which these texts express their authors' views and fears about the political and social implications of city life. The city and the country were contrasted in the convent narratives; the texts identified the city with squalor, crime and worldliness, whereas they depicted the countryside as the natural home of hard work, happiness and Christian virtue. The city was seen as an

environment in which anti-republican and anti-American forces could thrive. This chapter will argue that the convent narratives reveal the economic preoccupations of their authors; that these writers were markedly suspicious of and hostile to economic change; and that their suspicions centred on the implications these changes had for the republic and its values.

Between 1789 and 1850 the United States underwent significant economic and demographic changes. When the Declaration of Independence was first composed, the thirteen colonies were overwhelmingly agrarian. The vast majority of the nation's white inhabitants were Protestant and, although many nations were represented, most white people were descended from British colonists. Towns and cities were growing, as trade and manufacturing expanded. However, the nation-to-be was not in any sense as yet an industrialized country. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the economy, stimulated by a post-war boom from 1815, began to evolve towards market capitalism and industrialization, enriching some while causing anxiety for many.

Between 1800 and 1850, American towns and cities grew enormously in order to accommodate the increased number of industrial workers as well as huge numbers of immigrants.[152] As a result, life changed markedly for town-dwellers, and also for people in rural areas, where economic activity came to centre more and more on servicing the city. It was the former who experienced the greater amount of change and social dislocation, as the urban sprawl grew bigger and bigger, while services and infrastructure – for example, sanitation, healthcare, poor relief, religious ministry, education - struggled to keep up. Observers feared the effects; for example, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in

[152] Immigration rose sharply in the first half of the nineteenth century. Between 1821 and 1830 143,430 immigrants entered the United States. Between 1831 and 1840 599,125 immigrants arrived. Between 1851 and 1860 this number had risen to 2,598,214. For more on immigrant numbers see Michael C. LeMay, Guarding the Gates: Immigration and National Security (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006.)

1835 'I look upon the size of certain American cities, and especially on the nature of their population, as a real danger.'[153]

The representations of immigration and economic change in the convent narratives were overwhelmingly north eastern in their orientation, and for this reason the demographic and financial changes in the south and west during this period are not discussed in depth in this chapter.

Immigration

Immigrants, particularly Irish immigrants, featured in most of the convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s. These new arrivals were portrayed in an overwhelmingly negative light. Many of the narratives feature polemical diatribes against immigrants, or against immigration itself. The prominence of this theme exemplified the nativist reaction to the sheer scale of immigration in the mid-nineteenth century, which was dramatically altering the demographic character of the north-eastern states and the mid-west. The arrival of millions of Irish and German Catholics is probably the most significant factor in the revival of nativism in the 1840s and 1850s. Anti-Catholicism, never far from the surface of society, was fuelled by the arrival of a vast number of immigrants who looked and sounded strange to American eyes, who were not familiar with American institutions, who were often desperately poor and ill, and who followed the hated Catholic religion. While the earlier convent narratives of the 1830s were generally hostile to foreigners and people from Catholic nations, they were not so marked in their hostility to immigration in itself as the later narratives of the 1850s and 1860s. The immigration of the 1830s, while extensive when compared to

[153] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, (New York: J. & H.G. Langley, 1841 [1835]), I, 317.

that of previous decades, was really a precursor to the massive influx that succeeded it. The generation of immigrants which fled the Irish famine after 1845 was poorer, more desperate, and, in that many of them did not speak English, more 'foreign.' The arrival of hundreds of thousands of German immigrants, many of whom settled in German-speaking communities, and who actively sought to preserve their German heritage, created another tangibly 'foreign' presence in the United States.

Nativists argued that Catholic immigrants were ignorant and corrupted. They were usually viewed in the convent narratives as being irredeemably damaged by Romish influence, although they did feature in some texts as individuals who might be turned into useful and Protestant members of society by proper re-education. This, though, was relatively unusual. It was more common for the convent narratives to depict immigrants in a purely negative light, and to ascribe their condition to the influence of the Catholic faith. Immigration was blamed for the squalor that became endemic in many American cities in first half of the nineteenth century, particularly the port cities of the north-eastern seaboard. William Earle Binder, for example, described 'a brood of squalid, ignorant Irish' in his 1857 novel Madelon Hawley. Ned Buntline described an Irish area of New York in similar terms: 'You know were [sic] stands the Cathedral of St Patrick. Vast and sinister in its external appearance, surrounded, too, by filthy habitation and pestiferous streets; and guarded, as it were, by the most degraded of the papal transports of Ireland.'[154]

Jane Dunbar Chaplin argued that Catholic immigrants were kept poor, if not reduced to penury, by the demands of the Catholic church; in her novel The Convent and the Manse (1853), Mary, a pupil in a convent school, criticized it on these grounds:

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155 'Hyla' [Jane Dunbar Chaplin], The Convent and the Manse (Boston, John P. Jewett & Company, 1853), 140.

> I was tempted last night at vespers to blow out all the wax candles, and exchange them for bread for the starving Irish. It would be more credit to [the convent] to have less light, and bestow more mercy on the thousands of their communion who beg in the streets and throng our almshouses. I don't believe they strive to lighten with their little finger the burden their people impose on us in the way of poor-tax and private charity.[155]

In another example, from The Arch Bishop by Orvilla Belisle (1855), a Bishop (his diocese is unspecified) upbraids the virtuous Father Francis for not collecting enough money from his congregation: 'How is this that, with a congregation of two hundred, you have never paid any funds into the Church treasury? By this time you ought to have collected five thousand dollars for that purpose...even the children wore shoes and hats – you had no right to foster such extravagance at the expense of the Church.'[156] This theme persists after the Civil War; in the 1869 novel Priest and Nun the Irish character Pat Mora complains of his father that 'He's taken food out of my mouth and clothes off my body to give money to the priest, and that's what I call unnatural';'[157]

Many immigrants arrived in the United States in a state of ill-health brought about by malnutrition at home and their sufferings at sea. Nancy Lusignan Schultz suggests that the cholera epidemic of 1832, attributed by most physicians to a poisonous 'miasma' arising from decomposing corpses and from sewage, was connected in many minds with the growing cities and the filthy slums the most unfortunate immigrants inhabited: 'During this epidemic, cholera became inextricably linked to xenophobic fears about the increasing numbers of Irish, and almost a metaphor for the Catholic threat, descending on New England as it did from Quebec and Montreal.'[158] As the number of immigrants increased, and cities grew, the threat of disease retained its potency,

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155 'Hyla' [Jane Dunbar Chaplin], The Convent and the Manse (Boston, John P. Jewett & Company, 1853), 140.
156 Orvilla S. Belisle, The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855), 107-108.
157 Julia McNair Wright, Priest and Nun (Philadelphia: Crittenden & McKinney, 1869), 256.
158 Nancy Lusignan Schultz, Fire and Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834 (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 139.

spreading particularly quickly among the malnourished survivors of the Irish famine who had crossed the Atlantic in densely packed ships.

The foreign arrivals were also blamed for outbreaks of violence, both between 'native' Americans and newcomers and between different immigrant groups. The Arch Bishop (1855) offered an account of the mid-1840s rioting in Philadelphia and placed the blame squarely at the feet of the Irish immigrant population: 'From the roofs, windows and loop-holes which had been prepared by their assailants, yards and alleys of the range of buildings in which the Catholics were safely ensconced, a destructive fire was opened upon the defenceless citizens by those within.'[159] Ned Buntline's novel The Beautiful Nun (1866) depicted a violent confrontation between Irish immigrants and native American firemen; an Irishman 'struck [a fireman, Hickey] with a short club, loaded with lead. The poor fireman fell forward on his face, while the blood gushed from his head. "Take that for remembrance sake, ye Yankee heretic!" he added, kicking the senseless man in the face with his heavy iron-clad shoe.'[160] Although violence was common in American cities in the mid-nineteenth century, immigrants were viewed as particularly prone to fighting, in part because of Old World animosities which encouraged battles between different immigrant groups.

Many 'native' Americans saw these new Irish and German populations as not merely non-American, but anti-American - as representing a dangerous, alarmingly 'foreign' threat to American values. These views were not new in the 1850s. W.C. Brownlee, writing in 1834, had called Catholic immigrants 'imported colonies of vicious and ignorant men' and 'vassals of the Pope.'[161] The following year, still before immigration reached its peak, the anonymous introduction to Richard Baxter's Jesuit

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159 Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 222.
160 Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 61.
161 W.C. Brownlee, 'Dedication' in Letters in the Roman Catholic Controversy (New York, published for the author, 1834), iv.

Juggling called Catholic immigrants 'priest-ridden multitudes.'[162] In 1839 the Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine described 'an armed conspiracy of foreign ruffians.'[163] Similar views were still current in the 1850s. The Arch Bishop (1855) called the immigrants 'hordes of serfs' who 'were transported to the land of freedom, to poison its fount.'[164] By 1856, Anna Carroll felt able to offer a historical perspective; 'The frightful increase of this immigrant population began in 1837 and 1840...but not until 1846 had the Irish and German rush to our shores become a startling and terrible calamity.'[165]

Perhaps the most sinister aspect of immigration for nativist writers was the power they believed the Catholic clergy and foreign institutions exerted over the new arrivals. Immigrants, these writers argued, were 'tools' of the Catholic hierarchy and despotic European governments. Some writers, like Charles Frothingham and Orvilla Belisle, adopted the 'Know-Nothing' agenda, calling for limits to the admission of immigrants and restrictions on their access to government employment and elected office. These writers expressed apprehensions, shared with the Know-Nothings, that immigrants were usurping the power and privileges, whether political, social or economic, that lay rightly, they believed, in the hands of 'native' Americans. Know Nothings were concerned that citizenship was too easily and too quickly granted, enabling immigrant groups to obtain political ascendancy by weight of numbers. The physician, writer and Know Nothing, Samuel C. Busey (1828-1901), claimed in 1856, for example, that 'Numerous instances could be cited where the leaders of political parties have been compelled to submit to the decision of the foreign population of their respective election districts, which of the

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[162] 'Introduction', Richard Baxter, Jesuit Juggling. Forty Popish Frauds Detected and Disclosed (New York, Craighead and Allan, 1835), x.
[163] 'Review of the Case of Olevia Neal the Carmelite Nun, Commonly Called Sister Isabella,' The Baltimore Religious and Literary Messenger, October 1839, 441.
[164] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 18.
[165] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 343.

candidates should be run by their party for an office.'[166] This fear was particularly acute regarding the Irish immigrants, who had in many cases gained experience of political organization and who brought these skills to the United States, achieving electoral success.

These fears are demonstrated in Charles Frothingham's convent tale, The Haunted Convent (1854), which commenced with a scene in which a politician barters with a priest for the votes of immigrants. The scene would have suggested to readers that the governance of the United States was nothing more than a source of patronage for the Catholic clergy; the politician tells the priest:

> I need not tell you how anxious I am to be elected, nor the exertions I have made to get the nomination. I have been liberal with my money, and will be still more so, provided I can obtain the Catholic vote. You have been recommended to me as having a large share of influence with the Irish population, and therefore to you I confidently appeal to you to help me in my hour of trial.[167]

Such claims continued into the 1860s; The Beautiful Nun (1866) argued, in typically extravagant terms, that in the current political climate, 'To be an American is to be disqualified for office!'[168]

Nativists argued that immigrants were downtrodden and ignorant of the concepts of personal liberty and dignity, and that they were therefore biddable and easy to manipulate, and that the Catholic church was taking advantage of their influx to influence American policy and to erode the freedoms of Americans. Isaac Kelso's convent tale, Danger in the Dark: A Tale of Intrigue and Priestcraft (1854) argued that immigrants posed a threat to American values, especially American liberties:

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[166] Samuel S. Busey, Immigration: Its Evils and Consequences (New York: De Witt & Davenport, 1856), 25.
[167] Charles Frothingham, The Convent's Doom: A Tale of Charleston in 1834: Also The Haunted Convent (Boston: Graves and Weston, 1854), 21.
[168] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 74.

> When we look at the immense crowds of foreigners that perpetually flow into this country – the large majority of whom are ignorant and degraded – having been taught little else than implicit, servile, and blind obedience to the clergy, it cannot be thought strange that we should apprehend danger to the civil and religious liberties we enjoy and so highly prize.[169]

Belisle claimed in The Arch Bishop (1855) that the Roman hierarchy had deliberately engineered Catholic emigration from Europe with the specific aims of achieving political hegemony and undermining American republicanism:

> Formerly emigrants sought only for an honest livelihood for themselves and their families, and rarely meddled with the institutions of which it was impossible they could comprehend the nature: *Now* each new-comer seeks political preferment, and struggles to fasten upon the public purse with avidity, in strict proportion to his ignorance and unworthiness of public trust – having been *sent* for the purpose of obtaining political ascendancy in the government of the nation – having been *sent* to exalt their allies to power – having been *sent* to work a revolution from republican freedom to the divine right of monarchs.[170]

Such views persisted in the post-war period, as shown in The Beautiful Nun (1866); the hero, Oby, states that 'nine-tenths of you Greeks [Irish] are paupers, shipped out here by the Catholic church to underwork us, undermine our institutions, and destroy us. Like snakes and rats, you do no good, but destroy everything in your reach!'[171]

Some nativists argued that the new arrivals were racially inferior to native Americans. The author Thomas Bangs Thorpe (1815-1878) argued to this effect in 1855:

> The Anglo-American is the king of men. He possesses all the powerful and commanding nature of the Anglo-Saxon, the clear, cool head, the sober, calculating mind, the regard for law, the obstinate adherence to justice; but freed and fired by the pure bright air of America.[172]

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[169] Isaac Kelso, Danger in the Dark: A Tale of Intrigue and Priestcraft (Cincinnati, Moore Anderson, Wilstach and Keys, 1854), 251.
[170] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 299.
[171] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 145.
[172] Thomas Bangs Thorpe, A Voice to America; or, The Model Republic, Its Glory, or Its Fall (New York, Edward Walker, 1855), 23.

He argued that 'an American should demand from every foreigner, as an equivalent for the hospitality extended to him, a full recognition of the supremacy of this same Anglo-Saxon race.'[173] In 1856 Anna Carroll expressed horror that 'By the last census, 1850, there were upward of eight millions of people in this Union devoid of Anglo-American blood!'[174] An anti-Catholic novel of the same year, The Huguenot Exiles, stressed its heroine's Anglo-Saxon ancestry, stating that she 'did not resemble her [French] mother; the Saxon blood of her father's race glowed beneath her pearly skin.'[175] William Earle Binder's anti-Catholic novel Viola; or, The Triumphs of Love and Faith (1858) also evoked these theories; the hero 'Kenneth Egerton' 'was of pure American blood.' The author amplified that 'for generations back all [Egerton's] ancestors had been American Protestants.'[176] For those who subscribed to these theories, the non Anglo-Saxon American immigrant weakened the strength of the Unites States as a whole.

Even more seriously, it was argued that immigrants were endangering 'American' values and institutions. Many of the new Catholic Americans did not speak English and nativists believed that this symbolized their refusal to participate in American life. Many immigrants refused to conform to (predominantly north-eastern) norms of observing the Sabbath; this was condemned, as for example in the introduction to Jesuit Juggling (1835): 'When we remember the proportion of Papists in our large cities and towns, is it possible that such an irreligious and contaminating system should exist, and be in full operation among them, and that all other persons should escape the infectious

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173 Thorpe, A Voice to America, 95.
174 Anna Ella Carroll, The Great American Battle; or, The Contest Between Christianity and Political Romanism (New York, Miller, Orton and Milligan, 1856), 342. Anna Carroll (1815-1894) was a political activist, pamphleteer, and advisor to Abraham Lincoln during his presidency. She was a member of the prominent Carroll family, which had Catholic ancestry.
175 Eliza Dupuy, The Huguenot Exiles; Or, The Times of Luis XIV. A Historical Novel (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 121.
176 William Earle Binder, Viola, or The Triumphs of Love and Faith (New York, Evans and Company, 1858), 58.

contagion?[177] Conflicts over Bible-reading in public schools, anti-democratic practices at elections, the ownership of church property and other issues where the Catholic church or immigrants refused to conform to established practice, added to nativist perceptions that Catholic immigrants were undermining American practices and institutions.

Some writers argued that foreigners were actively hostile to liberty, democracy and the American way; Samuel S. Busey argued in 1856 that the War of Independence was attributable to 'the antipathies and animosities of the foreigners to American liberty.'[178] Eliza Dupuy's novel The Mysterious Marriage (circa 1853) described a 'Grand Lodge of the Ancient Order of Hibernians': 'the members composing it were selected as much on account of their shrewdness and bitter animosity to Americans and Protestantism as for their intellect or education.'[179]

Catholic immigrants were perceived to be heavier drinkers than native Americans, and it was believed that a disproportionate number of inns and saloons were run by the Irish and by Germans. Their refusal to conform to traditional patterns of alcohol consumption gave a political edge to the accusations of intemperance that were levelled against them. The merchant and philanthropist John Pintard (1759-1844) wrote in a letter to his daughter that 'the vice of drunkenness among the lower labouring classes is growing to a frightful excess...and the multitudes of low Irish Catholics...restricted by poverty in their own country, run riot in this...as long as we are overwhelmed with Irish emigrants, so will the evil abound.'[180] 'They bring the grog

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177 Baxter, Jesuit Juggling, xvii.
178 Busey, Immigration, 11.
179 Eliza Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage: A True Romance of New York Life (Philadelphia, TB Peterson and Brothers, circa 1853), 27.
180 'Letters from John Pintard to his Daughter Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833', New York Historical Society Collections 70-83 (1937-40), 3: 51-52, quoted in Barbara J. Berg, The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 44.

shops like the frogs of Egypt upon us,' claimed one writer in 1849.[181] Eliza Dupuy's novel The Mysterious Marriage (circa 1853) depicted Irish immigrants holding a political meeting, and implied that the proceedings were fuelled by drink; 'Speeches were delivered by naturalized, and half-starved politicians, solicitous of obtaining votes at the forth-coming election – and the proceedings were very *spirited* throughout.'[182] In 1854 the Know Nothing and American Crusader recounted a story of 'an Irish woman [who] died from the effects of *sixteen quarts of beer* and a quantity of rum and brandy drunk by her.'[183] In this era, many 'respectable' people equated temperance with Christianity and the association of immigrants with drunkenness implied that the new arrivals were both godless and a dangerous influence on Americans. The poverty of many Catholic immigrants added to their perceived drunkenness to give these fears a strong element of class hostility. (See pages 131-132 for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between nativism and temperance.)

The convent narratives frequently criticized Irish Americans, but rarely directed attacks specifically against German immigrants. It is likely that this reflected the greater concentrations of Irish immigrants in the cities of the north eastern seaboard, where the anti-convent authors tended to reside, and where the publishing industry was concentrated, compared with the tendency of German immigrants to move inland to the cities of the Midwest or to rural areas. Having nowhere else to go, many of the Irish immigrants remained in the port cities and were subsequently blamed for their ills. Ray Allen Billington argues that 'the average American…could see quiet city streets transformed into unsightly slums by the foreigner's touch.'[184] As discussed above (122,

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[181] American Protestant Magazine, IV, February 1849, quoted in Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), 323.
[182] Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage, 99.
[183] The Know Nothing and American Crusader, August 19, 1854, 3.
[184] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 322.

151) the arrival of the newcomers accelerated the growth of the cities faster than the developing infrastructure could keep up and they were blamed for the results and for the problems of the city.

Immigration, in the view of some nativist writers, gave employers undue power over their employees, in that immigrants were often willing to work under worse conditions than native born Americans. For example, Samuel C. Busey argued in 1856 that immigration aided heartless and unscrupulous capitalists to enrich themselves at the expense of honest workers: '[Immigration] is the ally of the money power of this country, and this money power is being constantly exalted to depreciate the value of labor and of property in which it seeks investments.'[185] American freedom was linked by Busey to the well-being of an independent and proud labour force; he called it 'the great bulwark of freedom, and the foster-mother of liberty.'[186] It was also claimed by nativists, as well as members of the labour movement, that the immigrants would take 'American' jobs. For example The Know Nothing and American Crusader reported in 1854 that 'Not an American-born citizen is employed upon the Washington Monument. The only American employed was discharged just previous to the last election to make room for an Irish Roman Catholic…It is a disgrace to the country – an insult to Washington!'[187] However, the convent narratives made few explicit references to such themes. It can be surmised that their authors did not identify closely enough with either manual labourers or industrial employers to highlight such themes; that these issues were simply not relevant to them. This gives weight to the suggestion that these authors may have been, in the main, economically marginalized figures.

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[185] Busey, Immigration, 81.
[186] Busey, Immigration, 81.
[187] The Know Nothing and American Crusader, August 19, 1854, 3.

Class antipathies formed a partial basis for the anti-Irish bias in the convent narratives. Americans took pride in the (relative) egalitarianism of the United States. The hero of The Arch Bishop (1855), the 'martyr,' Shiffler, gives 'thanks to our forefathers who won this boon for us, that no man is born to station or honor – they are alone for those who deserve them.'[188] Of course there had always been distinctions between rich and poor, labourers and gentlemen. However, as the economy, and the population, grew, a new degree of class-consciousness, even class antagonism, became apparent, particularly in the most populous areas. As banking, trade and industry expanded, the richest in society accumulated vast wealth while the poorest suffered dire hardship. Paul Johnson argues that 'work, family life, the makeup of neighborhoods – the whole pattern of society – separated class from class: master and wage earner inhabited distinct social worlds.'[189] In such a context, non-wealthy middle-class individuals – as the authors of the convent narratives mostly appear to have been - were anxious to establish their place in the economic nexus and, to an extent, to reassure themselves that their status was sufficiently high to differentiate themselves from the (increasingly stigmatized) poor. For the typical middle-class American, aspiring to respectability and wealth, the immigrants may have figured as unwelcome reminders of a more traditional and less genteel way of life. Richard Brown suggests that 'perhaps one of the reasons for the keenness of nativist anxiety was that the immigrants represented the traditional network of values and relationships that the natives had been working so hard to escape.'[190]

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[188] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 57.
[189] Paul E. Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millennium : Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 (New York, Hill & Wang, 2004 [1978]), 55.
[190] Richard Brown, Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865 (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), 153.

The convent narratives display class-consciousness, both in their negative depictions of the immigrant poor and more generally. The pauper status of many immigrants was especially alarming to these writers. Such absolute poverty was relatively unknown in the United States prior to the great waves of immigration in the 1840s and 1850s. Nativists were angered by what they perceived as old Europe's cynical use of the United States as a 'dumping-ground' for European paupers and criminals. This is a common theme of anti-immigration polemic. Anna Carroll wrote of 'the oppression placed upon our American laborers, artisans, metallurgists, and mechanics, by emptying the work houses of Europe upon the soil.'[191] Another example is found in The Arch Bishop (1855): 'For the last twenty years the almshouses of Europe have been emptied on our coasts, not casually or to a trivial extent, but systematically and upon a constantly increasing scale…the United States is constantly becoming the lazar-house and penal colony of Europe.'[192] Class, like wealth, was comparatively fluid in the United States at this time, as its infrastructure and institutions developed and grew; class hostilities in the convent narratives probably reflect their creators' fear of being undermined and, to an extent, usurped in respectability and gentility by immigrants who were working to improve their status.

These texts also reveal uncertainties about the growing presence of Irish servants in the middle-class family. The convent narratives regularly depicted the threat posed by Catholic servants. Their heroines are usually members of well-off middle-class families who can afford domestic staff. These writers thereby indicated, and approved of, this economic status. However, apprehensions about the safety of the home accompanied these themes. During the early and mid-nineteenth century, middle-class women, who had more income and leisure than their counterparts in earlier years, started employing

[191] Carroll, The Great American Battle, 330.
[192] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 298.

an increased number of servants. At the same time, industrial work was becoming more popular with native-born women who preferred manufacturing, with its higher wages and greater opportunities for independence, to working in service. Immigrants, and chiefly Irish immigrants, came to dominate domestic service as a result. S. J. Kleinberg has argued that Irish servants were commonly regarded as 'strangers' within the family: 'Employers distanced themselves from domestic help in the second quarter of the nineteenth century because they no longer shared cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds. Protestant or European-American mistresses believed that they had little common cultural ground with Irish Catholic or African Americans. Servant-employing families sought privacy and separation from these strangers inside their gates.'[193] Lydia H. Sigourney expressed these frustrations in her Letters to Mothers (1839):

> The want of good domestics is a general complaint. It constitutes one of the most formidable evils in housekeeping. From the number of manufactories, where female labour is in demand, and the dislike of servitude which prevails in a free country, it is more likely to increase than to diminish. The foreigners, on whom we are often compelled to rely, the daughters of Erin or Switzerland, cannot, from their estrangement of custom, and difference of dialect, readily assimilate to our wishes.[194]

Immigrants in service caused palpable unease in the convent narratives. The novel The City Side by Cara Belmont (1854) described a virtuous minister, Mr. Forester, who is 'careful that no Irish servant should enter his sanctum, as he called it', although he allows a young native-born woman (called Jennie) to do so. (Jennie's status is unclear; Belmont writes that she 'in time became as necessary in the family of the minister as at her own home.' She does not seem to be a servant, but rather a family friend who helps with domestic work because of her affection for the members of the

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[193] S.J. Kleinberg, Women in the United States, 1830-1945 (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 18.

[194] Lydia H. Sigourney, Letters to Mothers (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1839), 198. For more on the problems posed by Irish servants see Joan D. Hedrick, Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 118-119.

household.)[195] This extract clearly symbolizes the exclusion of immigrant labour from the heart of the home. It also recalls The Lamplighter by Maria Cummins (1854), an enormously popular novel (reportedly selling 40,000 copies in two months), and its description of the character of Mrs. Sullivan: 'She is exceedingly neat and particular in all her arrangements, has always done her work herself, and declares she would sooner admit a wild beast into her family than an Irish girl.'[196] In the same year, the novel Sister Agnes depicted a master manipulator in the person of a nun, Sister Agatha, who has posed as a servant in numerous Protestant homes:

> She had been employed in Protestant families in various capacities; even in that of a lady's maid; had always been prompt to report to head-quarters all that might be available to the cause of popery, had sometimes sown dissension and rancor in religious society; sometimes effected conversions to Rome, and always diligently, though covertly, promoted the interests of the 'Holy Catholic Church.'[197]

Orvilla Belisle's novel The Arch Bishop (1855) depicted a fictional Catholic 'order' established for the strengthening of Romanism in the United States, in which immigrants are key members, infiltrating American Protestant homes by means of domestic service:

> The thousands of Catholic servants with which large cities abounded, together with those weekly landed on our shores from foreign climes, were immediately enrolled in this Order, until numberless domestic circles were harbouring within their bosoms a serpent, whose fangs stung deeper, deadlier than the scorpion's...Boston, proud in her own moral strength with which she had so often checked and rebuked the foes of Liberty, hailed with joy the manly, firm stand that Philadelphia had taken. Not for a moment did she dream that, even then, the poison was eating into her very heart; that in hundreds of families spies were lurking under a meek servile garb, the insignificance of their position protecting them from suspicion or detection.[198]

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[195] Cara Belmont, The City Side; or, Passages from a Pastor's Portfolio (Boston: Phillips, Samson and Company, 1854), 113.
[196] Maria Cummins, The Lamplighter (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1854), 167.
[197] Anonymous, Sister Agnes; or, The Captive Nun. A Picture of Convent Life. By a clergyman's widow. (New York: Riker, Thorne & Co., 1854), 27.
[198] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 128, 179.

There are many other examples; in Six Hours in a Convent (1855) the hero arrives at his mother's house after a period of foreign travel to be met by the 'rough, repulsive features' of an unfamiliar Irish servant: ' "What in the devil do ye want, that ye should be after making all the noise?" the menial said, her eyes flashing with rage.'[199] The Mysterious Marriage (circa 1853) depicted the seduction of an Irish maid by a priest; he uses his power over her to force her to spy on the mistress she serves.[200] In Madelon Hawley (1857) a Catholic servant attempts (unsuccessfully) to poison a baby.[201] As late as 1869, in Priest and Nun, a nun states that while disguised as a servant 'I have lived in three houses as nurse-maid, and have baptized, or had baptized, ten young children. Seven of these children I baptized myself – three I took to the cathedral.'[202]

The ubiquity of these portrayals suggests that domestic labour was yet another locus for nativist prejudices and fears. The authors of these texts viewed the Catholic servant as a threat to the happiness and safety of the home. The emphasis placed on the servant's Irish nationality (invariably a signifier of Catholicism in these works) suggests that the servant's religion is the primary source of this threat. However, class was clearly an element of the threat; middle-class Catholics were much less visible in the convent narratives as agents of Roman treachery than servants. These writers interpreted any threat to the home and family as a threat to the nation itself. Furthermore, they dramatized the situation of the middle-class woman, encouraged by social norms to immerse herself in her household while at the same time being able, perhaps for the first time, to pay servants to do the bulk of the domestic work. These portrayals of treacherous servants can be read as manifesting social and economic fears

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[199] Charles Frothingham, Six Hours in a Convent; or, The Stolen Nuns! A Tale of Charlestown in 1834 (Boston, Graves & Weston, 1855), 11.
[200] Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage, 22-23.
[201] Binder, Madelon Hawley, 44.
[202] Wright, Priest and Nun, 131.

about the consequences of middle-class female leisure even while, on the surface, they appear to espouse the tenets of domesticity and economic progress that released middle-class women respectively from wage-earning (or participating in family concerns) and from the back-breaking labour of previous generations.

The convent narrative genre frequently used nativist stereotypes in its descriptions of Catholics, particularly Irish Catholics. These stereotypes constitute revealing evidence of attitudes to immigrants among these authors. Visually, Irish characters were depicted as ugly and coarse, and either brutishly large or small and underdeveloped. For example, in Charles Frothingham's novel The Convent's Doom (1854), an Irish servant ('a stout, vulgar-looking woman, whose accent proclaimed her Irish') is a tool of the wicked Catholic priest. The Irish porter of the titular convent is no more attractive – he is 'a huge, six foot fellow, with a repulsive face.'[203] The extent of Frothingham's distaste was not matched by that of his vocabulary or his imagination, demonstrated by another of his stories, Six Hours in a Convent; or, The Stolen Nuns! (1855) which contained similar phraseology; he wrote of another servant that 'the rough, repulsive features of an Irish girl were exposed to view.'[204] Belisle's characterizations were no more subtle; 'a coarse brawny son of Erin stepped in, and with a cringing bow, apologized for his delay.'[205] William Earle Binder depicted 'a duck-legged, flat-bodied Irishman, whose mouth was peculiarly adapted for the reception of a pipe, or a mess of potatoes and cabbage.'[206] The Mysterious Marriage described 'two miserable looking specimens of the genius Celt – unshaved – uncombed, and as dirty as though they had never known

[203] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 5, 10.
[204] Charles Frothingham, Six Hours in a Convent, 11.
[205] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 215.
[206] Binder, Madelon Hawley, 29.

what soap and water were; the only fluid, from appearance, they had indulged in was apparently very bad gin.'[207]

Some of the crudest stereotyping is found in the 1866 novel by Ned Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, which was one of the most obviously opportunistic of the narratives, embracing nativist ideas and anti-Irish prejudice in so far as they provide justification and context for the depiction of sexualized violence against helpless females, Buntline's primary objective. His story demonstrates the persistence of bigoted stereotyping. Buntline's 'hero', Oby, calls the Irish firemen of New York 'red mouthed Mickeys,' stating that 'a Mickey ain't no more fit for a fireman than a hog is for a waiter at a crack hotel. They oughtn't to be allowed to run a machine where white men work!'[208] In this extract, the Irish are implicitly stigmatized as 'non-white', in a manner that is clearly intended to be insulting. This was not unusual; Kevin Kenny argues that, in the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants 'were depicted both textually and visually in racially inferior terms. The images are stark...swarthy, low-browed, simian Irishmen, standing only a level or two above the animal kingdom, and apparently sharing the same degree of racial degradation attributed by contemporaries to African Americans.'[209] Buntline repeatedly contrasts Irish immigrants with 'white', 'native' Americans. He uses the epithet of 'red mouth' (perhaps intending to evoke racist caricatures of African Americans) and 'hairy-mouthed': 'See them, the hair yet long upon their teeth, their red mouths belching forth curses, breaking through the crowd of Americans, knocking them down right and left.'[210] The use of 'hairy-mouthed' and 'hair upon their teeth' is unique within the genre. The crudity and offensiveness of Buntline's writing is

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[207] Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage, 86.
[208] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 59.
[209] Kevin Kenny, The American Irish: A History (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 67.
[210] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 1866, 59, 73-74.

unparalleled in the convent narratives and offers an instructive insight into the way some members of American society talked and thought about Irish immigrants.

Some of these writers did advocate educating immigrants in American ways and customs, and in the tenets of Protestantism. Jane Dunbar Chaplin, writing in 1854, took the view that immigrants could be Americanized: 'As the emigrants become prosperous and intelligent and associate with Americans, their confidence [in Catholicism] is shaken, and their hearts are opened to the claims of a purer faith. Hundreds yearly either renounce Catholicism altogether, or silently slip from out of the fold.'[211] Orvilla Belisle, in her novel The Arch Bishop (1855), described approvingly a section of a Catholic congregation that had embraced American republican ideals:

> There was another class in [the] flock, and they were by far the largest and most influential part of it, who bowed to [the priest] in reverence and humility in the affairs of the Church; but when he attempted to interfere or influence them about their temporal affairs, turned coolly from him, and in many instances, peremptorily denied his right to dictate to them. They were mostly those who had been born in this country...Others of them had felt the galling yoke of oppression in the old world...[and] in fleeing renounced the unholy union of Church and State.[212]

The Revered Hiram Mattison, in The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, by the Roman Catholics (1868), defended Miss Smith on the grounds that while she was 'of Irish parentage' she was 'altogether American in conversation and manners.'[213] Most of the narratives, however, were more pessimistic as to how far immigrants could be Americanized.

The immigrant generally fared badly in the convent narrative. These writers were overwhelmingly hostile both to immigration, which they saw as helping to establish Catholicism in the United States, and Catholic immigrants, who, they argued, were

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[211] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 142-143.
[212] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 77.
[213] Hiram Mattison, The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, by the Roman Catholics, and her Imprisonment in a Nunnery, for Becoming a Protestant (Jersey City: published for the author, 1868), 6.

undesirable citizens as well as, more seriously, posing a real threat to American values and institutions.

The Changing Economy

Between 1776 and 1850 the economy of the United States was transformed. Agriculture and trade still dominated economic activity; in terms of growth, however, industry was the most dynamic economic force, driving social and political changes with it and demanding improvements to the nation's infrastructure, in the transport, banking and communications sectors. After 1850, these changes continued apace. While there was little overt discussion of economic conditions or policies in the convent narratives – the texts were, after all, concerned primarily to draw attention to religious and social concerns regarding American convents – the importance of economic considerations should not be overlooked.

The economic circumstances in which the convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s were published are of importance in analyzing their content. The convent narratives of the 1830s had been published at a time of rapid economic growth. The Panic of 1837 (when mounting financial speculation culminated in banks suspending payments in specie) and the ensuing depression coincided with a decline in the popularity of the American convent narrative. Although there is no evidence of a direct causal link, the fact that the convent controversy raged from the early 1830s until, apparently, suddenly subsiding in 1837 suggests that the economic recession contributed temporarily to defusing the issue, already muted by the discrediting testimony of William Leete Stone and William Sleigh, although attempts were made to revive the question in

the late 1830s and in the 1840s which were received with relatively little interest.[214] The economic crisis provided a far more visible and potent threat to the well-being of the republic than a shadowy Papal 'conspiracy.' It might have been expected that economic hardship would encourage nativism, but the chaos of the Panic and the immediate suffering engendered (an estimated third of New York's work force was made unemployed) appear to have left little room in the public consciousness for anti-convent feeling.[215] This may be because of the comparatively limited extent of Catholic immigration at this time, when contrasted with the massive numbers of immigrants after 1845.

While nativism persisted after the late 1830s, albeit in a less virulent form, there was a lull in anti-Catholic publishing until the mid 1840s, when polemical works critical of monasticism enjoyed a revival, inspired by general anti-Catholicism stimulated by the trusteeism and schools controversies, as well as the growing numbers of Catholics in the United States.[216] Nativist journals kept the issue alive in a small way, but they did so by publishing attacks on the Catholic hierarchy, rather than by employing the convent narrative genre. The economy was being slowly rebuilt following several years of depression. When the genre regained its former popularity, it was in the context of the resurgent economic growth of the mid-1850s. This may suggest that periods of economic growth were more conducive to this type of publication, particularly when

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[214] For post-1837 discussion of the convent controversy see 'Escape of a Nun from the Carmelite Prison in Aisquith Street. – Prodigious Excitement in Baltimore', The Baltimore Religious and Literary Messenger, September 1839, 429-431; 'Review of the Case of Olevia Neal the Carmelite Nun, Commonly Called Sister Isabella, The Baltimore Religious and Literary Messenger, October 1839, 433-441.

[215] Sam Bass Warner, Jr., The Urban Wilderness: A History of the American City (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), 77.

[216] For examples see H.A. Boardman, The Intolerance of the Church of Rome (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844); Harry Hazel, The Nun of St Ursula: or, the Burning of the Convent. A Romance of Mount Benedict (Boston, F. Gleason, 1845); William Hogan, A Synopsis of Popery, As It Was and As It Is (Boston: Saxton & Kelt, 1845); Auricular Confession and Popish Nunneries (London: Arthur Hall & Co., 1847)); Rufus Clark, Popery and the United States, Embracing an Account of Papal Operations in our Country (Boston: J.V.Bean & Co., 1847).

this growth was rapid and accompanied by social change and dislocation. This should not be overstated; there were many other reasons for the return of the convent narrative. However, the economic climate does appear to have influenced the production of these texts.

The growth of industry had numerous social and political consequences. (The employment of women in industrial work has been discussed above; see page 113.) As industry spread, employment opportunities were offered in the towns and cities, and agrarian workers exchanged the uncertainty of farm work for the more regular employment they hoped would be offered by factories and mills. While the thousands of workers who made this transition presumably felt it would benefit them and their families, it has been argued that there was a trade-off – that working on, or owning, land, had offered workers a feeling of involvement, and that this was lost when workers entered the mills and factories of the industrialized economy. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. took this view: 'The impact of the new industrialism in the Northern and Middle states...produced [a] contagion of discontent. Some workingmen were disquieted by the gradual loss of ownership over their means of production, others by their separation from direct contact with the market, others by the disappearance of any feeling of social or economic equality with the moneyed groups, still others simply by the physiological strain of adjusting to new habits of work and discipline.'[217] Difficulties in adjusting led, for some, to deep dissatisfaction and personal unhappiness. Marvin Meyers has suggested that 'Americans were boldly liberal in economic affairs, out of conviction and appetite combined, and moved their world in the direction of modern capitalism. But they were not inwardly prepared for the grinding uncertainties, the shocking changes,

[217] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 32.

the complexity and indirection of the new economic ways.'[218] Difficulties in adjusting may have encouraged victimization of negative reference groups.

Nancy Lusignan Schulz, in her study of the Charlestown convent burning in 1834, has identified economic frustrations in the 1830s among the brickmakers who lived near the convent and who, it seems, contributed to the rioting, Many were economic migrants from New Hampshire leaving behind exhausted soil for the industrial economy of the town:

> Now they lived in dirty, crowded all-male dormitories owned by the brickyard boss, and worked with their backs for an dollar or two a day…Daily, as they wiped the sweat from their eyes, the glanced up from the brickyards to see verdant Mount Benedict, where the daughters of some of Boston's most prominent Protestant families were receiving an expensive European-style education from a community of Ursuline nuns.

The cost of a year's tuition at the convent was roughly equivalent to six months' wages for a brickmaker.[219] For John Regan, 'the Ursuline convent and its lavish grounds symbolized to the town's large working-class populace the denial of educational opportunity at the expense of reinforcing class inequity.'[220] While these tensions are not directly confronted in the convent narratives of the 1830s, Schultz and Regan have demonstrated a link between these sorts of conflicts in society and hostility to convents in the 1830s which was manifested directly in the convent novels of the 1850s and 1860s.

While John Ashworth has argued that 'the values of the reformer...were structured by the interests, and rooted in the practices of, and emerging bourgeois class', it will be argued that the authors of convent narratives expressed a degree of uncertainty about

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[218] Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1957), 7.
[219] Schultz, Fire & Roses, 4.
[220] John Regan, ' "There Are No Ranks among Us": The Ursuline Convent Riot and the Attack on Sister Mary Ursula Moffat' in Nancy Lusignan Schultz (ed.), Fear Itself: Enemies Real & Imagined in American Culture (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1999), 98.

the economic developments of the period.[221] It is true that the convent narratives depicted middle-class families and lives, in doing so both expressing their creators' mindsets and purposefully attracting readers who sought depictions of genteel life. For However, while the anti-convent writers were not mill workers or factory hands, they appear to have felt that the hard and dehumanizing working conditions in industry had an evil influence on the rest of society. Augusta Jane Evans, the author of the anti-Catholic tale Inez: A Tale of the Alamo (1855) and a staunch supporter of the South, used Inez to highlight the suffering of industrial workers (and also to accuse the north of hypocrisy in attacking slavery while permitting industrialists and manufacturers to exploit their workers in the interest of economic growth):

> An air of comfort – American, southern comfort – pervaded the whole. The breakfast was brought in by a middle-aged negress, whose tidy appearance, and honest, happy, smiling face presented the best refutation of the gross slanders of our northern brethren. I would that her daguerreotype, as she stood arranging the dishes, could be contrasted with those of the miserable, half-starved seamstresses of Boston and New York, who toil from dawn till dark, with aching head and throbbing heart, over some weary article for which they receive the mighty recompense of a shilling.[222]

The convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s depict the effects of untrammelled capitalism on the morals of both the individual and the nation. The novel The Mysterious Marriage (circa 1853) claimed that 'Money in modern times is the ne pas ultra of life. In the days of the Revolution it was tyranny and oppression, trouble and toil, that tried men's souls, now it is money that tries their souls and buys their friendship.'[223] This view was also found in the temperance narrative Edith Moreton (1852); the author, Maria Buckley, wrote of the appropriately-named merchant Mr.

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[221] John Ashworth, Slavery, Capitalism and Politics in the Antebellum Republic. Volume I: Commerce & Compromise 1820-1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 155.
[222] Augusta Jane Evans, Inez: A Tale of the Alamo (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1855), 42.
[223] Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage, 94.

Sharpe that 'money was his God.'[224] Orvilla Belisle's anti-convent novel The Arch Bishop (1855) explicitly linked capitalist development to the weakening of American Protestant values. Belisle argued that the city of New York had been corrupted by wealth – 'New York has suffered herself to be led blindly captive…The wail of the oppressed fell unheeded on her ears. Commercial prosperity had perverted her heart; but it only slumbered.'[225]

Karen Halttunen has argued that the growth in financial speculation was personified in the advice literature of the mid-1850s by the figure of the gambler, who would, given the chance, ensnare and impoverish American youth: 'Gambling [for these authors] undermined all desire to practise industry…Because it brought gain without production and without industry through a game of chance, gambling was a kind of speculation.' Halttunen suggests that these attacks resulted from the economic transition, in which 'limited economic exchange, which was integrally tied up with the social relationships of the family and the immediate community, was giving way to an expanding market economy which appeared to many Americans as a giant, threatening game of hazard.'[226]

In the convent narratives of the 1850s, discussions of industry and manufacturing centred on the human costs. There were barely any overt references to national or state-level economic policy – to inflation, to the banks controversy, to the balance of trade, to wages, or to any of the specific details of the nation's finances – in the convent narratives. This does not necessarily mean that the authors of these texts were not interested in these issues, but it does suggest that these issues of national economic

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[224] Maria Buckley, Edith Moreton; or, Temperance Versus Intemperance (Philadelphia: published for the author, 1852), 12.
[225] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 212.
[226] Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study in Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 17, 19.

policy were of less importance to these writers than the enormous economic growth inspired by private enterprise. These authors are at best unconvinced as to its benefits and, more often, overtly opposed to the exactions industrialization made on the individual worker.

In the years following independence, the United States witnessed far-reaching developments in banking, trade and finance, which influenced the convent narratives. Richard Brown has argued that the Revolution itself was associated with tensions arising from modernizing economic forces: 'In some ways modernization was at the root of the conflict within the British Empire that led to American independence. For it was British efforts to centralize and rationalize imperial administration, so as to make the empire more efficient, that first aroused colonial protest.'[227] David Brion Davis argued that 'though most Americans took pride in their material progress, they also expressed a yearning for reassurance and security, for unity in some cause transcending self-interest.'[228] Such concerns are certainly identifiable in the convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s. Richard Hofstadter has argued that these themes are recurrent in American history:

> Much of our national anxiety can be traced to the fear that the decline of entrepreneurial competition will destroy our national character, or that the same effect will be brought about by our hedonistic mass culture and by the moral laxity that has grown up with and is charged to our liberal and relativistic intellectual climate.[229]

Post-1815, argues Charles Sellers, 'the decisive reshaping of the law to the demands of the market was being accomplished by lawyers and judges, both Federalist and Republican, in the state courts.' He suggests that this process of reshaping the nation to

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[227] Richard Brown, Modernization, 74.
[228] David Brion Davis, 'Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature', in Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 47:2 (September, 1960), 209.
[229] Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966 [1965]), xii.

a capitalist pattern extended also to politics; 'the American political system was tailor-made for the lawyers who largely designed it.'[230] Sellers' vision of a society becoming moulded to accommodate the structural demands of the market may well have been shared by traditionalists who associated change with loss and declension – a group which, it seems likely, included the authors of the convent narratives.

The Bank War was, for many, evidence of a sinister attempt, under the leadership of the patrician Nicholas Biddle, to impoverish ordinary people and to undermine American values. Andrew Jackson vetoed a bill to renew the bank's charter in 1832, calling its privileges 'unauthorized by the Constitution, subversive of the rights of the States, and dangerous to the liberties of the people.'[231] Sean Wilentz describes the effect of the Bank crisis and the depression of 1837 on ordinary people: 'For these ordinary Americans at the bottom of a chain of debt that they only vaguely understood, the panic and depression cracked upon huge questions about who was to be the chief beneficiary of the new business order – and about its implications for political democracy.'[232] Similar views persisted into the next decade. An article in the Racine Advertiser in 1847 argued against banks on political grounds: 'Beside all financial reasons there are most weighty political objections against banks. Money is power, and a great power; and the concentration of the money power in banks creates a great political power.'[233] Corporations too, were, for some, un-American bastions of privilege and inequality. Rush Welter argues that for Jacksonians 'corporations were intrinsically evil because they rested upon privileges not granted to everyone; in addition, the

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[230] Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 47, 48.
[231] 'Veto Message from the President of the United States, returning the Bank Bill, with his objections, &c.', July 10, 1832 (Washington: Herald Office, 1832), 1, via Library of Congress, 'American Memory' [http://tiny.cc/Al7fH, accessed 24 September 2008]
[232] Sean Wilentz, The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 216.
[233] Racine Advertiser, 17 March 1847, quoted in Rush Welter, The Mind of America 1820-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 167-168.

privileges they exercised - however necessary to their operations – seemed to Democratic doctrinaires to be further proof of their evil character.'[234] The anti-convent writers were no Jacksonians. However, such fearful visions of economic power being concentrated in the hands of an anti-republican elite were not necessarily restricted to Democrats, and the idea of a conspiracy launched by the 'money power' may have struck a chord with these writers, already predisposed to identify threats to the nation's freedoms.

The creators of these narratives were often obscure figures. There is no evidence to suggest that any of these writers enjoyed much financial security or had profited personally from the development of industry in the United States; indeed the internal evidence of the convent narratives suggests that they were, rather, apprehensive about the changes, if not positively disgruntled by them. They depict a society losing its values and being corrupted; this suggests that these writers felt they had nothing to gain from the changes taking place. The convent narratives, it can be argued, represent their authors' apprehension and doubt about the changes associated with economic development. Sean Wilentz has associated such fears with a need on the part of republicans to uphold their political values in the face of economic and social problems, using the example of James Harper (1795-1869), the publisher and American Republican Mayor of New York City from 1844-1845:

> Behind the watchwords "The Bible – liberty – My country or death" lay a steadfast refusal to admit that the social transformations of a quarter of a century – transformations that Harper had helped to initiate and complete – had altered the small producers' republic. Poverty, crime, immorality, and pauperism could never spring from any sickness of the American soul; the disease must have been imported by Catholics...aided by unvirtuous, selfish politicians.[235]

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[234] Welter, The Mind of America, 79.

[235] Sean Wilentz, Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1984]), 319.

Harper was a successful publisher but did not appear to identify with the developing capitalist class, even though he was a member of it. This highlights the importance of self-identification and self-perception in uncovering individuals' political and social views. While the authors of the convent narratives did not enjoy Harper's economic power and success, their response to the difficulties of modernization employed a closely related rhetoric, suggesting a set of shared values and concerns, notwithstanding their differing social and economic position and status.

Sellers argues for the existence of a 'middle-class mythology' that 'atomiz[ed] society into a marketplace rewarding each according to effort' and 'both fueled and justified success to quell rising anger over the class reality of bourgeois exploitation.'[236] This formulation, of a middle class which was straightforwardly opposed to working-class labour grievances, does not adequately explain the prevalent depictions in convent narratives, novels and other texts – written and designed to be perused by middle-class readers – of the hardships and hypocrisies of capitalism and industrialization. Sellers recognizes that 'broadsides, cheap weeklies, pamphlets, and serially published fiction expressed democratic anger at bourgeois corruption, hypocrisy, and oppression.'[237] He does not recognize, though, that more 'respectable' texts, like the more genteel of the convent narratives, could offer equally heartfelt denunciations. Some nativists, like Arthur Tappan and James Harper, were successful capitalists and it must not be assumed that they all disliked these developments. Nevertheless, the internal evidence of the narratives suggests strongly that their authors felt disconnected from and hostile to the growth of capitalism and industrialization. These attitudes were common among evangelicals, reformers and ministers, the constituencies to which the convent narratives (at least those texts which were primarily didactic rather than sensationalist or salacious)

[236] Sellers, The Market Revolution, 237.
[237] Sellers, The Market Revolution, 385.

most appealed. Amy Dru Stanley has noted 'an unmistakeable strain of ambivalence, even abhorrence, toward the market...[in] antislavery propaganda.'[238] Such views were related to a common perception that religious piety, and with it morality and humanity, were being eroded by modern worldliness. The authors of the convent narratives revealed their own insecure and uncertain relationship to the market economy in their works.

Urbanization

Immigration and economic developments led to urban growth, which had political implications in itself. In the classic Jeffersonian formulation of American democracy, it was the yeoman farmer who would sustain the republic and its virtue. However, the position of the farmer was being eroded by the move from the country to the town; the urban middle class was becoming more and more powerful numerically, and the urban wealthy were becoming more powerful financially.

For the authors of convent narratives, the city was a place in which the traditional social and moral influences of the church, the community and the family were less powerful and exerted less control over individual behaviour. The narratives reflect their authors' reaction to this loss of social control over the individual's behaviour; they are apprehensive of a breakdown in morality. Non-conformist behaviour was far less visible in a city than in a village, and this freedom was something dreaded and feared in the narratives, suggesting that their creators, while not from the

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238 Amy Dru Stanley, 'Home Life and the Morality of the Market', in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 88.

most powerful or wealthy strata of society, saw themselves as part of the moral leadership of the country.

The narratives shared a common perception that economic and demographic changes were having a deleterious effect on the nation. Eugene Arden has identified 'a growing sense that city life was not only irreligious and unnatural, but that the type of American produced by urbanism was somehow a sorry, shoddy product when measured against the rich ideal of individualism. And this sense of dissatisfaction…proved a more powerful influence on American fiction than any philosophy of optimism.'[239] The creators of convent narratives manifested this view; they, like most writers at this period, had little good to say about living conditions in the great cities and new towns. Their depictions of squalor and filth in the city slums were condemnatory of city authorities and the landlords, but were also intended to illustrate the degraded tendency of the poor and desperate.

For these writers, squalor equated to immorality or, at the very best, helplessness. By contrast, the 'deserving' poor in these texts take trouble to keep their homes gleaming. In The Beautiful Nun (1866), there is a description of 'A Mechanic's home – the home of an American mechanic', where 'the flag pavement that leads to the door is swept as clean from dust as the floor of the house within. The brass door-knob shines as brightly as if it were made of virgin gold. Everything...looks as clean and neat as a new pin.'[240] The sentimental novel Macaria; or, The Altars of Sacrifice (1864) by Augusta Evans, the author of the anti-Catholic novel Inez, further illustrated this tendency, depicting the home of the poverty-stricken but respectable Mrs. Aubrey and her niece Electra:

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[239] Eugene Arden, 'The Evil City in American Fiction', New York History 35:3 (July 1954), 259-260.
[240] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 114.

> Electra opened the cottage-door and ushered [Irene, the heroine] into the small room which served as both kitchen and dining-room. Everything was scrupulously neat, not a spot on the bare polished floor, not a speck to dim the purity of the snowy dimity curtains, and on the table in the centre stood a vase filled with fresh fragrant flowers.[241]

The contrasting degradation of the slums was depicted as engendering frustrations and grievances which have vicious tendencies.

While the city was seen as a place where poverty, crime and immorality flourished among the poor, the respectable and wealthy were, according to these texts, beset by the urban temptations of idleness, luxury and dissipation. The sensationalistic novel New York Naked by George Foster (circa 1850) dramatized this contrast. Foster depicted New York as a city of 'apparent prosperity, and…real misery' scarred by 'the haunts of crime, and filth, and licentiousness, the vast caravansaries without air or the light of heaven, crowded with hundreds of gasping paupers.'[242] In Foster's New York, virtuous poverty exists cheek by jowl with hypocritical and vicious wealth. The novel Paul and Julia (1855) evokes a similar picture, with the scene transposed to Naples; Paul tells Julia that 'the poor elbowed the rich, who, by their silk attire, seemed to mock their tattered dress.'[243] A similar description of Milan was given by Harriet Beecher Stowe in her 1862 novel Agnes of Sorrento, which was critical of Catholicism:

> Meek dwellers in those dank, noisome caverns, without any opening but a street-door, which are called dwelling-places in Italy, they lived in uninquiring good-nature, contentedly bringing up children on coarse bread, dirty cabbage-stumps, and other garbage, while all that they could earn was sucked upward by capillary attraction to nourish the extravagance of those upper classes on which they stared with such blind and ignorant admiration. This was the lot they believed themselves born for, and which every exhortation of their priests taught them to regard as the appointed ordinance of God.[244]

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[241] Augusta Jane Evans, Macaria; or, The Altars of Sacrifice (Richmond, West & Johnston, 1864), 15.
[242] George Foster, New York Naked (New York: Robert M. De Witt, n.d. [c.1850]), 24.
[243] John Claudius Pitrat, Paul and Julia; or, The Political Mysteries, Hypocrsiy, and Cruelty of the Leader of The Church of Rome (Boston: Edward W. Hinks and Company, 1855), 55.
[244] Harriet Beecher Stowe, Agnes of Sorrento (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), 302.

There was clearly a common perception among writers that the city, whether American or foreign, was a place where squalor thrived and where decency was under perpetual threat.

These texts were critical of fashionable life, partly on the grounds that convent schools were fashionable among some wealthy Protestants. The following exchange takes place in the novel Danger in the Dark (1854), demonstrating a perception that urban fashion was a contributory factor to girls receiving a Catholic education:

> 'I think it so strange, Mrs. May, to hear that Arabella is attending a Catholic institution!' said Mrs. Glenn, addressing a very fashionable-looking lady who sat next her.
>
> 'It is not *her* choice, but *mine;*' responded Mrs. May.
>
> 'That is still more singular – that you, a Protestant, should prefer educating your daughter at a Romish school, indeed surprises me much!'
>
> 'I cherish no religious prejudices, Mrs. Glenn.'
>
> '...I cannot help regarding it as very inconsistent, and exceedingly injudicious, in Protestant parents, to place their children in the hands and under the influence of papists, for instruction.'[245]

This scene suggests that the frivolity of fashionable city life is a direct factor in the success of Catholic schools.

The perception of the city as bad and the countryside as good was shared by some of the most popular novels of the period. The anti-Catholic author Augusta Evans included a scene in her novel Beulah (1859) where the heroine is disgusted by the fashionable pursuits of the city. She witnesses the dancing of a mazurka 'with a sensation of disgust, which might have been very easily read in her countenance; verily she blushed for her degraded sex.'[246] The Wide, Wide World (1851) by Susan Warner portrays the city as a market-place where one is liable to be cheated, and the countryside as a place of thrift, self-sufficiency and hard-won but sincere affection.[247] Barbara Berg

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[245] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 2.
[246] Augusta Jane Evans, Beulah (New York, Derby and Jackson, 1859), 330.
[247] Susan Warner, The Wide, Wide World (George Putnam, New York, 1851.)

has argued that 'bucolic imagery saturated American culture' in the nineteenth century. She suggests that

> The pastoral ideal, articulated by statesmen, philosophers, poets, and novelists, had been used throughout the nation's history to sanction activities, explain attitudes, and articulate hope...Through the repeated sentimentalizing of a rural existence they had not known and would never experience, Americans expressed their yearning for a simpler society.[248]

In the convent narratives, the city stood in contrast with the farm, the village and the small town, where honest work and innocent enjoyment were spurs to moral improvement. Agrarian life was widely viewed as more conducive to republicanism. The Knickerbocker Magazine stated in 1836 that 'It is to the agricultural portion of our community that we must look for the preservation of our liberties.'[249] The contrast between city and country was most overtly evoked in Jane Dunbar Chaplin's The Convent and the Manse (1853) which tells the story of two sisters. One, Isabel, is sent to a convent school while the other, Virginia, goes to live with Protestant relatives in the north-east of the country. The book uses this plot to exemplify the superiority of the latter mode of life over the former. Virginia immediately feels welcomed and at home at her uncle's manse which is also a farm. Isabel, however, finds her new home in the city cheerless and forbidding.[250] Chaplin associates the countryside with honest, hardworking Protestants and the city with scheming Catholics. There is an implicit link between land ownership and respectability, responsibility and pride.

While economic and demographic changes were inexorable and enriched many in American society, and also engendered a sense of excitement about American progress, it would be a mistake to view these changes as universally popular, as the evidence of the convent narratives demonstrates. These texts reveal deep anxieties

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[248] Barbara J. Berg, The Remembered Gate, 51.
[249] Knickerbocker Magazine, VIII, August 1836, 210, in Eugene Arden, 'The Evil City on American Fiction', 259.
[250] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 24, 40.

about the moral effects of urban living on both rich and poor, and the possible detrimental results of urban growth on the nation's republican values.

Conclusion

The convent narratives displayed attitudes which were generally unfavourable towards the socio-economic changes detailed above. Immigration, for these authors, caused a range of social, political and economic ill-effects, and immigrants were depicted as presenting a direct threat to the nation's security and values. Industrialization and the development of the market economy were seen as eroding individual happiness, personal morality, and social control. Urbanization was blamed for creating disease, squalor and misery for the poor, and temptation for the rich.

The authors of these narratives expressed, without necessarily intending to do so, their own profound dislike of, and dislocation from, the socio-economic changes taking place in the nation, and they represent for us a whole section of society which may not have been wealthy or politically powerful but who wielded their pens at a time when popular novels and personal testimonies were enormously popular. Here we see evidence of social, economic and demographic changes pulling the country in one direction while an influential strand of popular culture tried, unavailingly, to pull it the opposite way.

Chapter 5: The political context of the convent narrative

This thesis argues that the American convent narratives published between 1850 and 1870 expressed their authors' fears about the safety of the American republic and its values. This chapter will examine the relationship of these narratives to their political context. These writers expressed profound fears that the American republican experiment would be subverted by both internal and external forces, and they feared that the values of the republic (as they perceived them) were in danger from anti-republican plots associated with the forces of monarchy, autocracy and popery. They also feared mob rule and demagoguery. The narratives expressed these views both explicitly, by denunciation and sermonizing against 'anti-American' influences, and implicitly (perhaps inadvertently) by means of characterization and plot. This chapter does not argue that the authors of convent narratives used this form merely as a vehicle for political views; however, it will be demonstrated that their dislike of Catholicism was closely linked to their perception that it was an anti-republican force.

Prior to 1776, inhabitants of the American colonies enjoyed differing levels of political participation. At best, local representative assemblies wielded considerable power over state policy. At worst, the colonists were ruled by allegedly corrupt and oligarchic governors installed by the British government. In the years immediately preceding 1776, dissatisfaction with the British government grew and consolidated, partially in response to measures like the Stamp Act which were regarded as unfair and tyrannical. There was a powerful philosophical edge to this unhappiness, namely republicanism. Republicanism was the major political impulse behind the American War of Independence. Although specific grievances were of great importance in precipitating the break with Great Britain, the ideology of republicanism underpinned

the American reaction to these events and sustained the campaign for independence. This ideology underpinned the new nation-state and its self-perception, and it was encapsulated in the Declaration of Independence.

Republicans emphasized what George Washington called 'the sacred fire of liberty': Jefferson wrote in 1774 that 'The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time.'[1] They also argued that the people, as a whole, were sovereign, and ought to be governed by their representatives, rather than by an autocratic monarch or hereditary elite. This is not to suggest that they believed each individual American should have an equal right to participate in government; women, children, slaves, and others were not seen as capable of exercising the political rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The interests of these groups would, however, it was believed, be safeguarded by the political participation of husbands, fathers, and slaveholders, who would, republicans argued, represent the household paternalistically. Republicans believed that representative government was more conducive to virtue than other forms which inevitably, in their view, tended to corruption. Revolutionary republicans did not necessarily, however, favour democracy, in the modern sense of majority rule by an elected government. Many believed rather that the populace could best be governed by the most able and most virtuous. It was often argued that the popular vote would lead to the election of demagogues, and that the consequences of mob rule would be as destructive as autocracy.

Another tenet of republicanism was the importance of self-government and self-determination. This resonated especially with American republicans, who were aggrieved by the treatment of their states as mere colonies, ruled – and taxed - from

[1] George Washington, First Inaugural Address, 1789, in The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 28; Thomas Jefferson, A Summary View of the Rights of British America (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1943 [1774]), 23.

across the ocean. Such treatment was especially galling to colonists who remembered John Winthrop's image of 'a city upon a hill', which would offer an example of a godly civilization to the rest of the world. This religious heritage combined with the Enlightenment idea of humans' potential for good to create an American self-image of a country with a special destiny. Bernard Bailyn suggests that by 1776, 'Americans had come to think of themselves as in a special category, uniquely placed by history to capitalize on, to complete and fulfil, the promise of man's existence.'[2] And, by 1828, Rush Welter argues, most Americans 'held that the American people had already achieved historic European hopes and implied that the Unites States had already fulfilled the progressive dreams of mankind.'[3] If other nations were entitled to self-determination and independence from colonial oppression, how much more, then, did this chosen nation deserve these rights? According to Welter, 'Americans of almost every political persuasion' shared 'a belief that the United States had somehow appropriated the progress of liberty to itself.'[4] Jackson's Farewell Address in 1837 emphasized the special destiny of the American people:

> You have the highest of human trusts committed to your care. Providence has showered on this favored land blessings without number, and has chosen you as the guardians of freedom, to preserve it for the benefit of the human race.[5]

American republicans argued that the British government was corrupt; that it did not represent the colonists; that its rule was arbitrary; and that it had undermined the liberties of the American people. For these reasons, republicans argued, it was justifiable to reject British rule. These grievances were essentially republican and reflect

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[2] Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, 20.
[3] Rush Welter, The Mind of America 1820-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 4.
[4] Welter, The Mind of America, 7.
[5] Andrew Jackson's Farewell Address, March 4 1837, in Register of Debates, House of Representatives, 24th Congress, 2nd Session, 2177, via Library of Congress, 'American Memory' [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llrd&fileName=027/llrd027.db&recNum=388, accessed 24 September 2008].

the importance of political ideology among the causes of the American Revolution. It is true that there were immediate and pressing issues of contention, such as taxation, which contributed to the hostility of American leaders to British rule and which were linked to economic hardship. However, opposition to these measures was based on a sense that they were morally wrong, as well as economically oppressive. The political ideology of republicanism was at the heart of the rebellion against British rule, and remained at the heart of political discourse in the United States in the years before 1870.

The first seventy years of the American republic were marked by conflict and change in the sphere of politics. Political parties emerged, dividing along the fault lines of banking and industry, foreign policy, and slavery. Republicanism, having served very well as the ideological motivation for, and justification of, the War of Independence, continued to be invoked by politicians. They argued that the new nation, the living embodiment of republicanism, would be imperilled if their chosen policies were not followed. Many politicians felt a growing sense that, because they as individuals were republicans, that meant that the policies they believed in – at local, state and national level – were therefore necessary for the success of the republic. This perception became a fixture of American political rhetoric and was adopted by polemicists in every field – including the anti-convent writers.

Political debate, campaigning and rhetoric changed vastly over the seventy years. Partisan rivalry and bitter personal antagonism emerged early in Washington's administration and remained powerful elements in American political life. Personal hostility between political rivals combined with a sense of personal association with the republic to create a political climate in which divisions and frustrations were endemic. Combating politicians attacked each other with vehemence using intemperate language

and some even threatened rivals physically. Duels were common.[6] The most extreme manifestation of political ire was Representative Preston Brooks' attack on Charles Sumner in the Senate in 1856.

Political controversies in this period included several which would influence the convent narratives after 1850. In the constitutional sphere, the Alien and Sedition Acts passed in 1798 were widely interpreted as tyrannical and un-American attacks on liberty. To opponents of 'states' rights' advocates, the nullification crisis of the early 1830s appeared to be threatening the integrity of the Unites States as well as its republican values. Indian removal was another policy which was attacked by opponents as inhumane and anti-republican. Slavery was a hugely divisive issue; both opponents and defenders invoked republicanism and the constitution to lend weight to their arguments.

In the economic sphere, controversies over tariffs, the First and Second Bank of the United States and internal improvements were accompanied by similar rhetoric. Discussions of foreign policy were also influenced by republican concerns for the nation's safety. Immigration represented a visible incursion into the United States by non-American influences, and was welcomed or otherwise by observers as they perceived it to be of benefit or otherwise to the nation. The growth of Mormonism in Missouri in the 1830s was a similarly visible manifestation of a potential threat to American values; the Mormons were expelled from the United States territory because they were thought to pose a tangible threat to the nation. These controversies illustrate the ways in which republicanism, and veneration – and anxiety – for the United States, pervaded political discourse in this period. This discourse was profoundly influential in

[6] The most famous duel between American politicians was that held between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr in 1804, in which Hamilton was killed; while the duel appears to have been caused in the first instance by a private dispute, it offers an example of a toxic relationship between two leading politicians in the early years of the republic.

its effects on American writing, not least the narrative of reform and the anti-convent story.

The chapter begins by discussing the origins and importance of American republicanism as a powerful and lasting political force, and the relationship between republican values and anti-Catholicism. This will lead to an examination of the tendency, identified by Brion Davis and Hofstadter, towards political paranoia and conspiracy theories, and the connection between this tendency and the prevailing republicanism of the time. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the three-sided interaction of republicanism, paranoia and anti-Catholicism which is found in the American convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s.

Revolutionary republicanism

American republicans were influenced by various political traditions. In the pre-Revolution period many colonists had been familiar with Greek and Roman works on republicanism, as the study of the classics was central to university education in this period. According to Caroline Winterer, 'next to Christianity, the central intellectual project in America before the late nineteenth century was classicism.'[7] Study of these works may have instilled an early pessimism in readers who learned from the classical writers of the impermanence of the virtuous republic. More relevant to the American situation were the works of the English Whig writers, like John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon and Benjamin Hoadly in the early eighteenth century, and Richard Price, Joseph Priestly and James Burgh in the Revolutionary period, which drew on the writings of John Locke. Their writings were closely followed by disenchanted colonists. These

[7] Caroline Winterer, The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 1.

emphasized the importance of equality and liberty in combating the ever-present threat of tyranny. American republicans, influenced by these works, argued that King George III had become a despot and that the unique rights and freedoms gained, at great cost, in the course of English history were being overturned. Their use of this argument to justify armed revolution ensured its longevity.

In contrast to the rights-based ideology which had descended from Locke and which was promoted by the English Whigs, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Lord Kames, Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid believed that a society's virtue was based on members performing the duties they owed to their position in life. This conception stood in direct opposition to Locke's 'social contract' model and was rejected by adherents of Locke, notably Thomas Jefferson. However, while Lockian Jeffersonianism was central to the development of the revolutionary movement in the colonies, the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers was also important. By the final quarter of the 18th century their work was the basis for the teaching of philosophy in America. Their belief that, were the people to cease performing their duties to the state – if they should, perhaps, become preoccupied with money-making or politicking – the state's virtue would wither and die, was clearly related to nineteenth century fears for the safety of the American republic.[8] Of course, many Americans were not aware of the intricacies of philosophical thought but this does not mean that these theories were not influential, whether directly or indirectly.

The American Revolution was a consequence of innumerable local and nation-wide tensions; of these, however, the conception that individual and national liberty was under attack from the British government was vitally significant. Historians have established that the theme of conspiracy was prominent in revolutionary thought, for

[8] See Rosemarie Zagarri, 'The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America', The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., 55:2 (Apr., 1998), 213.

example Bernard Bailyn argues that 'the fear of a comprehensive conspiracy against liberty throughout the English-speaking world – a conspiracy believed to have been nourished in corruption, and of which, it was felt, oppression in America was only the most visible part – lay at the heart of the Revolutionary movement.[9] Bailyn quotes the message of Boston's Town Meeting to its Assembly Representatives in 1770: 'A series of occurrences, many recent events…afford great reason to believe that a deep-laid and desperate plan of imperial despotism has been laid, and partly executed, for the extinction of all civil liberty.'[10] Some republicans believed that the British government was conspiring to undermine American Protestantism, citing, for example, the Quebec Act (1774) which granted Quebec's Catholics the right to practise their religion freely.[11]

After the outbreak of the War of Independence, the promotion of republican ideals became an important tool in winning, and retaining, the support which was so necessary both for the war effort and for the recruitment of troops. Pro-republican propaganda demonized King George as a tyrant and republican ideals were promoted in pamphlets and newspapers. Britain was portrayed as an aggressor against its own subjects, who, republicans argued, sought only those liberties they were entitled to as British citizens, and which the government was withholding from them. This interpretation exonerated the colonists from the charge of treason, and also perpetuated the notion that dark forces, such as conspiring Jacobites and Catholics, were working to undermine the constitutional monarchy.[12] This is not to argue that republican rhetoric

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[9] Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), ix.
[10] Quoted in Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, 94.
[11] See Francis D. Cogliano, No King, No Popery : Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 41-51.
[12] See Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution; Caroline Robbins, The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1969). For a historiographical overview, see Robert E. Shalhope, 'Republicanism and Early American Historiography', William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., 39:2 (Apr., 1982), 334-356.

was insincere, merely that propagandists were pragmatic enough to make use of it. They were successful in instilling reverence for republican principles, to the extent that, once independence was won, opposing factions debated, not whether the new nation should adopt these principles, but how best to do so.

Fear of tyranny and the subversion of the republic persisted after the Revolution. The Federalist argued in 1787 that 'though a wide ocean separates the United States from Europe; yet there are various considerations that warn us against an excess of confidence or security.'[13] To be taken seriously any politician or office-seeker had to adhere to republican principles and the ideal of 'liberty.' A conspicuous concern for republican values could mask meaner motives. In the first years of the United States, before the concept of a loyal opposition became acceptable, division over any less important matter would be criticized on the grounds that it engendered a spirit of faction or party. Therefore, to avoid criticism on this score, partisans linked controversial issues (sometimes tenuously) to the preservation and furtherance of the new nation's freedoms. Although political 'parties' were later established, it continued to make good political sense to link a particular political objective to the concept of 'liberty.' Rush Welter describes this technique: 'appeals made to the electorate could logically state the issues of any given election as a mere *reprise* of issues already settled at an earlier day. On this view, the object of any political campaign was to revive public virtue by invoking the precedent of the Founding Fathers.'[14]

Although not every republican was hostile to Catholicism, the ideologies of republicanism and anti-Catholicism tended, in practice, to reinforce one other. In both the United States and Great Britain, political thought was influenced by Protestantism, which was the predominant theological alignment, both demographically and in terms

[13] The Federalist With Letters of 'Brutus' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), No.24, 113.
[14] Welter, The Mind of America, 27.

of power, in each nation. While prioritizing individual experience and the individual conscience, Protestant theologians were by no means inclined to disregard the political sphere, if only because they perceived the enemy, Catholicism, as aggressively political in its aims. Most politically-minded Protestants were deeply influenced by their faith, in all areas of their thought. This indicates that political and religious ideology should be viewed as mutually reinforcing each other.

It should not be assumed that virulent anti-Catholicism was all-pervasive in the revolutionary period. There were republicans who were Catholic, and the alliance between the states and Catholic France in the War of Independence acted to neutralize traditional hostility during the latter years of the war. However the influence of Protestantism meant that American republicanism had an ambiguous relationship at best with Catholicism. Protestantism was such a potent force that it was inevitable that this ambiguity should be inherited by the United States.

Republicans were concerned to preserve individual liberty. This was on political grounds, although in this case as in others, political ideals were bolstered by economic and social pragmatism. Allan Nevins argues that 'rampant individualism was a dominant trait of American life,' suggesting that the drive towards individual liberty was not merely a theoretical ideal but was actually concomitant with American expansion.[15] Anti-Catholic Protestants believed that Romanism, in contrast to their own religion, was a form of slavery in which the papacy undermined freedom of conscience for its own ends, through a combination of religious indoctrination, political propaganda and the quashing of dissent, while, at the same time, removing the opportunities for individual development that were characteristic of American life. They believed that Catholics, even those American Catholics who were exposed to the benefits of republicanism,

[15] Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union. Volume I: Fruits of Manifest Destiny (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 45.

could never break free of Popish influence – even if they wished to do so. They believed that Catholics could never feel true and undivided loyalty to the United States. For these Protestants, the Pope stood in the role of an autocratic despot and the Rome as the polar opposite of the virtuous republic. The Superior of the Ursuline Convent only strengthened such perceptions in 1834 when she reportedly told the crowd which had gathered outside the convent that '[Bishop Fenwick] has at his command an army of twenty thousand Catholic Irishmen who will burn your houses.'[16] This almost certainly represented an attempt by an angry and frightened woman to disperse a sizeable and hostile mob by threatening it, rather than an actual estimate of the Bishop's capacity to raise an army, but her words were taken as evidence of Irish Catholic disloyalty to the United States authorities.

Liberty and conspiracy were vitally important concepts in the new republic and these concepts were explored throughout the convent narratives, which were steeped in the republican doctrines espoused by the Founding Fathers. Their authors feared, though, that public virtue was easily corrupted – and that Catholicism posed a serious threat to the nation, best demonstrated, for them, in the alleged seduction, manipulation, imprisonment and ill-treatment of American nuns.

Political paranoia and conspiracy theories

Historians such as Richard Hofstadter and David Brion Davis in the 1960s, as well as new generations of writers in succeeding decades who have followed their lead, have argued persuasively for the existence of a so-called 'paranoid' mindset among Americans which was manifested early in the new republic and which continued to

[16] Quoted in Nancy Lusignan Schultz, Fire and Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834 (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 5.

affect political life for centuries (and arguably to the present day.)[17] In this interpretation, enemies of the republic were continually hatching conspiracies against the United States; Michael F. Holt suggests that 'Since the Revolution, Americans from both sections had been obsessed with the fragility of republics, with the danger power in any form posed to liberty, and with the susceptibility of republican self-government to usurping conspiracies and plots.'[18] Davis agrees, believing that 'the American people have been…subjected to continual alarms and warnings of imminent catastrophe.'[19] Such a perception may have been influenced by the prominence of classical themes in education. Winterer suggests that 'classical history especially supplied Americans of the early republic with the cautionary tales so central to classical republican political theory: that republics were fragile entities suspended perilously in time and that balanced governments depended upon the civic virtue of their citizenry.'[20] Those who were influenced by this perception suspected that all mishaps were attributable to these conspiracies, rather than mischance; they suspected that their way of life was inimical to despotic and tyrannical forces which sought to overthrow it. This is not to argue that such beliefs were necessarily stated overtly, or that people who held them were conscious of any overwhelming paranoid fears, but that many people were affected by these views, even subconsciously. A close reading of the convent narratives supports these conclusions, as will be demonstrated in the course of this study.

Americans' self-image, as individuals and as a nation, was bound up in the republic and its survival. The nation had risked, and sacrificed, so much that the perpetuation of the nation's core values, the values of the War of Independence,

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[17] See Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966 [1965]); David Brion Davis, ed., The Fear of Conspiracy. Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).
[18] Michael Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 134.
[19] Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, xiii.
[20] Winterer, The Culture of Classicism, 19.

became an emotional and political necessity. Davis argues that 'if the nation's liberty and very existence had depended on the exposure of a conspiratorial plot to destroy traditional ways of life, one could reaffirm kinship with the Founding Fathers by re-enacting the primal resistance to subversion.'[21] This connection, in the context of a rapidly growing and changing society, caused problems of accommodation which reached a peak in the decade before the Civil War. Allan Nevins argues that while the dominant traits of American life by the early 1850s were 'individualism, materialism, and optimism' as well as democracy, 'few men paused to reflect that the four attributes were not wholly harmonious…In both economic and political spheres, individualism and materialism were allying themselves to place fetters on democracy.'[22] Such an unstable accommodation between often-competing values placed stresses and strains on the American nation.

Another factor contributing to the 'paranoid' mindset was embedded in republican thought itself. While republicans idealized positive virtues, they also believed that individuals were easily corrupted and that power was the surest road to corruption. Corruption, in its turn, lead to the erosion of liberty. It was, therefore, natural for republicans to fear that virtue was fragile, and, moreover, that good men and women, and virtuous institutions, were, by their very honesty, vulnerable to subversion and corruption by the manipulative and devious forces of tyranny. These paranoid impulses were in part another legacy of Protestant England and the political climate of preceding centuries, when the British Isles had seemed at risk from various threats to both the nation's sovereignty and to its Protestant religion, including the Armada, the Gunpowder Plot, and the Jacobite rebellions. This heritage, when combined with the

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[21] David Brion Davis, The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 11.
[22] Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, I, 51.

vulnerability of the still-embryonic United States, helped foster an environment of fear and suspicion. David Brion Davis argues that Americans 'exhibited a profound sense of insecurity regarding the strength of public virtue and the permanence of their traditional way of life.'[23]

The actions of the British government in the period immediately preceding the War of Independence were widely interpreted as a plot to rob Americans of their rights; for example, in 1774 the Connecticut minister Ebenezer Baldwin (1745-1776) wrote that 'I do not see how any one can doubt but that there is a settled fix'd plan for *enslaving* the colonies, or binding them under arbitrary government, and indeed the nation too.'[24] Once the United States came into existence, events seemed to bear out the idea of multiple conspiracies. The debate over the new constitution revealed suspicion of foreign powers as well as fear that the majority might be manipulated by a demagogue, or, conversely, that the minority might gain an ascendancy via the tyranny of the elite. The controversy associated with the events following the French revolution similarly manifested the fears and suspicions that were rife at this time. Additionally the scare over a supposed secret society of Bavarian 'Illuminati', prompted by the Edinburgh professor John Robison's book Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe (Edinburgh, 1797), which argued that the Illuminati had mounted an international conspiracy to abolish Christianity and overturn the world's governments, foreshadowed the anti-Masonic movement of the 1820s and 1830s.

Once the political dividing lines were established and the notion of 'party' lost some of its opprobrious connotations, debate over the best course for the nation grew in intensity and hostility, and controversy was inevitably linked to accusations of

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[23] Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, 1.

[24] Ebenezer Baldwin, 'The Heavy Grievances the Colonies Labor Under', in An Appendix, Stating the Heavy Grievances the Colonies Labor Under From Several Late Acts of the British Parliament (New Haven, 1774), 66. Quoted in Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, 32.

conspiracy. Sean Wilentz argues that 'precisely because opposing groups claimed to champion the same ideal, they fought all the harder to ensure their version would prevail.'[25] Michael F. Holt suggests that 'When Americans differed with each other politically, it was not so much over the desirability of republican government as over their perceptions of what most threatened its survival.'

The controversy over the Second Bank of the United States, for example, had a highly conspiratorial flavor. Jacksonian Democrats attacked the Bank and it its officers, believing that they were attempting to undermine the American nation in order to enrich themselves and their caste, and also, more importantly, to concentrate power in their own hands. Another instance of conspiratorial thinking was the anti-Masonic campaign. Opponents of freemasonry argued that the initiated represented an oligarchic cabal which was conspiring against American liberties. (The anti-Masonic movement is discussed further in Chapter 7.)

The idea that the state and by extension the liberties of the people, were in peril became fixed among a section of society including people of all political tendencies. Americans seemed predisposed to see threats, both external and internal. Of course, this was an important element of electioneering and propaganda; Holt argues that in times of uncertainty 'it was only natural for ambitious politicians who hoped to build new parties to follow the traditional practice of identifying and crusading against antirepublican monsters.'[26] At the same time, it is evident that this discourse reveals very real apprehension and fear for the republic's future.

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[25] Sean Wilentz, The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), xxi.
[26] Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s, 5.

The 'Catholic conspiracy' against the United States

The culture of paranoia was a real and potent force which linked to the convent narrative, which reflect the centrality of this mindset both to the people who created the narratives and to the American people in general. Such suspicions naturally tended to foster hostility to the unknown or the unusual. For the majority of native-born Americans, Catholicism was an exotic and unfamiliar religion and one which had been condemned by religious and secular leaders for generations. Even those American Protestants who were disposed to tolerate Catholicism were likely to retain a residue of prejudice. Anti-Catholic propaganda had painted Romanism as a false religion and its priests as manipulators and deceivers, constantly seeking to undermine the true religion by foul means. Such a heritage, combined with the natural tendency to distrust the unfamiliar, made Catholicism an easy target for conspiracy theorists, whether they sincerely wished to preserve the nation or cynically sought a scapegoat.

Many of the convent narratives claimed that Catholicism was essentially incompatible with republicanism. Isaac Kelso wrote in the preface to his anti-convent novel Danger in the Dark (1854) that 'to delineate the spirit, principles, and tendency of anti-Republican Romanism in this country has been the undisguised aim of the Author.'[27] Similarly, the anti-Catholic novel Madelon Hawley (1857) states that

> Better there were no future for [Catholicism] in this country, then might America become entirely free – entirely republican; but while that incubus rests upon her great heart, and with its rank poison impermeates every artery of her system, that result can never be achieved – for catholicism [sic] is inimical to republicanism.[28]

[27] Isaac Kelso, Danger in the Dark (Cincinnati: Moore Anderson, Wilstach & Keys, 1854), v.
[28] William Earle Binder, Madelon Hawley, or, The Jesuit and His Victim: A Revelation of Romanism (New York: H. Dayton, 1857), 177.

Jane Dunbar Chaplin's The Convent and the Manse (1853) is more temperate, but, in common with Madelon Hawley, argues that Catholicism cannot be reconciled with republican patriotism; "If [a man] be a true republican…he ought to be eligible to any office. But that no true Catholic can be…they are all subjects of a crowned head, and swear allegiance to the Pope. With a true patriot, his country's good is foremost; but with Catholics, the Holy Mother Church claims the first and the last thought, - everything is subservient to that."[29] These writers believed that the very nature of Romanism made it impossible for a Catholic to be a good republican, because the Pope demanded complete fealty from his subjects no matter what their nationality. This supposed allegiance to a foreign monarch inspired fears of a nightmarish overthrow of American freedoms, and their replacement with the tyrannies and injustices which were, reportedly, the norm in Catholic countries. These fears seemed, to nativists, to be reasonable and well-grounded in the despotic behaviour attributed to the Pope and to previous popes. They believed that the surging numbers of Catholic immigrants, conditioned in blind obedience, as nativists thought, to the Catholic church, was as seen giving untold strength to the papacy at the expense of the American republic.

Another reason for the supposed incompatibility of Catholicism and republicanism related to equality. Republicans argued not for total egalitarianism, but for equality of opportunity. The convent narratives condemned Roman Catholicism for promoting inequality and injustice and for elevating the priest above his flock, and they celebrated the opposing principle of equality. For example, the Truckman, one of the heroes of Charles Frothingham's work The Convent's Doom (1854), is depicted as being unconcerned with rank or social hierarchy: 'Everywhere was he known – sometimes shaking hands with the rich banker on State street, and then grasping the

[29] 'Hyla' [Jane Dunbar Chaplin], The Convent and the Manse (Boston, John P. Jewett & Company, 1853), 138.

hard fist of a coal heaver. It appeared to make no difference with the giant whether the man was rich or poor.[30] Orvilla S. Belisle's novel The Arch Bishop (1855) praises the principle of equality: 'Thanks to our forefathers who won this boon for us, that no man is born to station or honor – they are alone for those who deserve them.'[31] The Arch Bishop contrasts this republican equality with the Catholic hierarchy, personified here in the unchecked power of the sinister 'Archbishop' of the title.[32]

The convent narratives depicted the Catholic church as perpetuating a near-feudal society where individuals were bound, like serfs or slaves, to suffer inequality and injustice with no hope of redress – whether in Catholic countries or in Catholic communities in nominally Protestant lands. Josephine Bunkley's narrative expressed horror at the abuses of power she witnessed: 'My recollection of my novitiate at St Joseph's will ever be associated with a feeling of contempt and abhorrence for these men who use their advantage of rank and position to the basest ends, and with deep thankfulness for my own escape from their insidious snares.[33] Sarah Richardson's Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (1858) tells how she is forced to labour to cook food for others to eat while she endures perpetual hunger: 'The priests, superiors, and the scholars had every luxury they desired; but the nuns, who prepared all the choice dainties, were never permitted to taste anything but bread and water.'[34] And the Mother Superior in Priest and Nun (1869) 'was a Sybarite in holy orders. Her dress was of the

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[30] Charles Frothingham, The Convent's Doom: A Tale of Charleston in 1834: Also The Haunted Convent (Boston: Graves and Weston, 1854), 16.
[31] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855), 57.
[32] The 'Arch Bishop' was almost certainly intended to evoke John Hughes, the Archbishop of New York (1797-1864).
[33] Josephine Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book: Testimony of an Escaped Novice (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855), 142.
[34] Sarah Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal. An authentic narrative of the horrors, mysteries, and cruelties of convent life (Boston: Damrell & Moore, 1858), 50.

richest and softest material; costly her rosary; costly her crucifix; costly and dainty every item from her headgear to her silken hose and kid shoes.'[35]

The belief that Catholicism and republicanism could never co-exist led, naturally in a country soaked in the rhetoric of conspiracy, to the belief that the papacy was actively trying to undermine the republic. Many of the narratives explicitly warned of a papal plot against the United States (although they were vague as how the Catholic church would actually effect the coup.) The Rev. Dr. Rufus Clark, a Congregationalist minister from New Hampshire, had described the alleged conspiracy thus in 1847:

> We have seen enough…to convince us that a deep, systematic, and extensive plan has been adopted, and is now in progress, to overthrow our institutions, and bring this nation under the blasting and withering influence of Romanism. Nor has the world ever witnessed a more gigantic undertaking for the production of evil, and the destruction of good, than is presented by this conspiracy against the liberties and religion of the United States.[36]

Thomas Ford Caldicott wrote in the narrative Hannah Corcoran (1853) that 'The Romish church, being founded upon political principles, governed by worldly motives, and directly opposed to the kingdom of Christ, aims at nothing less than universal political dominion.'[37] In the British novel Sister Agnes (1854), which was republished in New York the same year, the Jesuit, Padre Carlo, claims that 'we shall rule vast empires…America shall drop her boast of liberty at our feet, and haughty Britain [shall] be humbled in the dust; - the continent of Europe is ours already.'[38]

There are many more examples, suggesting the ubiquity of this theme. In Isaac Kelso's anti-convent novel, Danger in the Dark (1854), another Jesuit named Dupin argues that 'only by stratagem can we hope to succeed. With professions of friendship

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[35] Julia McNair Wright, Priest and Nun (Philadelphia: Crittenden & McKinney, 1869), 93.
[36] Rufus Clark, Popery and the United States (Boston: J.V. Bean & Co., 1847), 16-17.
[37] Thomas Ford Caldicott, Hannah Corcoran (Boston: Gould & Lincoln, 1853), 22.
[38] Anonymous, Sister Agnes; or, The Captive Nun. A Picture of Convent Life. By a clergyman's widow. (New York: Riker, Thorne & Co., 1854), 32.

to the government, and the cherished institutions of the Republic, we must seem to allay suspicion; and through enticing words and fair speeches, decoy and beguile the unwary; and by flattery and fawning work our way to political power and influence.'[39] Roman Catholic conspiracy, according to an ex-Jesuit, Joseph, in Madelon Hawley (1857), is a real threat. He believes that 'upon America [the Vatican's] eager eye has long been fixed; and some day you must either accept her slavery, directly or indirectly, or unite to crush her power.'[40] Hiram Mattison, a decade later, wrote in his account of the alleged abduction of Mary Ann Smith, and her incarceration in a home for fallen women, that '*Romanism is receiving large sums of money every year*, from the Propaganda, at Lyons, France, to subjugate this land to the Papal faith. Of this we have abundant proof.' (He pragmatically continued 'but [we] have not space for it here.')[41]

The aims of this alleged conspiracy varied slightly depending on the preoccupations of each writer describing it. However, the common element was the Pope's lust for temporal power. Traditional republican ideology held that power in itself was an evil that needed checks and balances to prevent its abuse. Republicans believed that power was a corrupting force and one which, exercised without restraint, would erode liberty and lead to tyranny.

In the view of anti-Catholic writers, the spiritual and temporal absolutism of the papacy illustrated this corrupting tendency only too well. An institution primarily geared, as they believed, towards gaining temporal dominion over as many people and lands as possible was clearly incapable of tolerating principles such as liberty and republicanism, and was, equally clearly, very capable of using any means necessary to subvert them. For these writers, the conspiracy was not merely a characteristic weapon

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[39] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 112.
[40] Binder, Madelon Hawley, 179.
[41] Hiram Mattison, The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, by the Roman Catholics, and her Imprisonment in a Nunnery, for Becoming a Protestant (Published by the author: Jersey City, 1868), 135.

of a secretive and manipulative church; it was also the typical weapon of the devious usurper. Hence, the notion of a conspiracy was supported both by the specific characteristics of the 'enemy' (perceived Catholic underhandedness) but also by its very status as an enemy (Catholicism was supposedly opposed to virtuous republicanism, so it must by its nature tend towards corruption and tyranny and conspiracy.)

The convent narratives furnish ample proof that their authors feared Catholic plots and priestly duplicity in general. Isaac Kelso wrote that 'we have to do with a most formidable religious organization, whose object it is to tyrannize over the human mind, and stifle the very breath of liberty.'[42] In The Convent's Doom (1854) Father Inglasa, a Catholic priest, describes the Pope's designs on the United States; 'Because America is new, you must not think we have neglected her. Our society can count its thousands here, and in a few years the General of the Order will make this country his headquarters instead of intriguing at Rome.'[43]

The writers of the convent narratives did not merely fear that the Catholic church would usurp power; they also feared that it would abuse this power to further its own ends at the expense of the rights of the people. They repeatedly claimed that the Inquisition was scheming to establish itself in the United States. In Danger in the Dark (1854) a Catholic Bishop claims that the Inquisition will 'effectually put to silence the hellish doctrines of free-thought, free-speech, rights of conscience, and the right of private judgment in the interpretation of Scripture [in America.]'[44] The Jesuit, Dupin, cries with relish that 'The impious tree of liberty shall be scathed by the vengeful lightnings of Rome, and shattered beneath the crashing thunders of the Vatican!'[45] In The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith (1868), the Reverend Hiram Mattison argued that

[42] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, v.
[43] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 8.
[44] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 77.
[45] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 21, 70.

the Inquisition 'both in principle and in practice is now seeking to plant itself upon our shores, and to find toleration and legal recognition under the flag and laws of our glorious Union.'[46]

The Inquisition was a powerful symbol of the perceived ills of Catholicism and a common motif for writers of anti-Catholic fiction who frequently detailed its punishments in gruesome detail. Ned Buntline's sensational novel The Beautiful Nun (1866) depicts the tortures of the Inquisition at length; this extract is a characteristic sample:

> The black curtain was raised and a horrible sight was that which it revealed. The upper end of the room, beyond the table of 'The Seven,' seemed like a slaughter house. There was the dreaded rack, with human bodies stuck upon its jagged points, or strained upon its wheel. Though life had departed from them, the victims with distorted visages, torn and bloody limbs were there. In one place, (oh, God what a mockery for Christians to perpetrate!) was the body of a man dead upon a cross.[47]

American Protestants were well aware of the cruelties practised in the early modern period, from Foxe's Book of Martyrs (1563) among many other sources; and to suggest that the Inquisition would import such tortures to the United States was to exploit a deep seam of terror. The extracts above show that the convent narratives aimed to evoke a visceral fear of the demise of the American republic followed by Catholic torture and persecution.

The Inquisition, for these authors, was only one manifestation of Catholic brutality. Josephine Bunkley's account of her residence in a Maryland convent illustrates the horrors of arbitrary rule. She claimed that secret councils meted out punishments with no appeal. She compared this process to the Inquisition: 'When a sister commits an offense, she is brought before the council, and all affairs of importance are settled by these inquisitors at such meetings.' Her text takes the image of a secret police system

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[46] Mattison, The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, 5.
[47] Ned Buntline, The Beautiful Nun (Philadelphia, T.B. Peterson & Brothers, 1866), 25.

further: 'The utterance of a single unnecessary word is reported, every part of the building having its spy for that purpose.'[48] Life in a convent is comparable that in a police state. This is further demonstrated in Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (1858) which features a scene in which a nun is summarily executed, on the orders of an unknown bishop, for killing the convent's Superior: 'The priests were immediately all called together, and the Bishop called upon for counsel. He sentenced her to be hung that morning in the chapel before the assembled household.' In this episode, the usurpation of the civil function of justice by the religious suggests that the rule of law - an important element of the republic - has no jurisdiction within convent walls, being replaced, at best, by a religious code of law which is incompatible with republican values, and, at worst, by the arbitrary and tyrannical will of the ranking cleric. Life in the Grey Nunnery describes the suffering the heroine endures as a result of this tyranny:

> I saw very clearly that there was but one course for me to pursue, and that was, to obey in all things; to have no will of my own, and thus, if possible, escape punishment. But it was hard, very hard for me to bring my mind to this...To every command, however cruel and unjust, I must yield a blind, passive, and unquestioning obedience.[49]

According to Richardson, the unfettered power enjoyed by convent authorities engendered outright sadism. The experiences of Bunkley and Richardson in convents, together with the lurid depictions of the Inquisition in the novels of Kelso and others, offered warnings to Americans about the kind of treatment they could expect if the papacy succeed in its alleged conspiracy to assume temporal and spiritual dominion over the United States.

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[48] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 59-60, 77.
[49] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 154, 13, 25.

The conspiracy in history

Convent narratives commonly depicted events in the nation's history. They extolled the virtues of the colonists and upheld the glory of the Revolutionary War; they praised equally the Founding Fathers and the ordinary soldiers who fought for republicanism. For example, in Edward Goodwin's novel Lily White (1858), the Italian character Simonetta is described as having 'often read of the honor, daring, and noble-heartedness of the Americans, and that evening she had the opportunity of witnessing that true courage which has achieved a thousand brilliant victories and has written the name of America in undying characters on the highest pinnacle of fame!'[50] George Washington's name is frequently invoked; the heroine of the novel Annie Wallace by Harlan P. Halsey (1857) argues that "Napoleon, with all his magnificent glory, cannot claim one faint ray of that hallowed light that symbolizes the glory of the great and noble Washington."[51] Writing in 1855, Isaac Kelso quoted the first president's Farewell Address to argue against 'foreign interference in domestic institutions.'[52] Orvilla Belisle also invoked Washington; she claimed him as an ally in the anti-Catholic crusade:

> [The Pope] turned with longing eye to the new continent. His power was waning in the old; aye, his days were already numbered, and he purposed to abandon his tottering throne and rear a new one on the continent. This could not be done by force, but stratagem might succeed. Accordingly his emissaries, laden with the poisons that had desolated Europe and clothed in the garb of peace, flooded every mountain and vale…The specious covering did not hide from the sight of our ancestors the loathsome trail. Washington's eye as upon it, and he said to those who confided and looked to him for succor in times of need, "Against the insidious wiles of Foreign influence the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake."[53]

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[50] Edward Goodwin, Lily White: A Romance (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1858), 70.
[51] Harlan P. Halsey, Annie Wallace; or, The Exile of Penang. A Tale (New York: Miller & Holman, 1857), 22.
[52] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 252.
[53] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 18.

The author of Startling Facts for Native Americans (1855) cited the claim by 'the illustrious La Fayette, the companion and fellow-soldier of Washington…that "If ever the liberty of this republic is destroyed, it will be by Roman priests." '[54] The Constitution, too, was lauded by nativists who feared it would be eclipsed by anti-American forces. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, writing in 1855, called it 'a frame of government the nearest perfection which the world has ever seen.'[55] These authors used such themes to praise and bolster republicanism while highlighting the threat posed by opposing forces, including the papacy and the Catholic monarchies of Europe.

These authors commonly invoked historical imagery. Orvilla Belisle compared the native-born Americans of the mid-nineteenth century to the Founding Fathers; 'The patriotic elements which composed this NATIVE AMERICAN band, came home to the people with irresistible force. In it they recognized the spirit which actuated their sires of 1776!'[56] For Belisle, the nativists and the revolutionaries were defending the same rights and liberties. Andrew Cross suggests the same in Priests' Prisons for Women (1854): 'We want security for the personal liberty of a young woman in a convent. That liberty was bought at too dear a price to be sold to priests.'[57]

Charles Frothingham linked the War of Independence to the anti-Catholic campaign, extenuating nativist excesses in the process, almost as a wartime necessity against an equally dangerous enemy. In The Convent's Doom (1854), he invoked the glory of the Revolution: ' "Truckman!" cried the old man, fiercely, "on yonder height my father fell fighting beside Warren. He was as old as I am, but did he shrink from his duty? No, he wielded his musket until it broke into a hundred pieces, and then he died,

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[54] Anonymous, Startling Facts for Native Americans called "Know-Nothings," or A Vivid Presentation of the Dangers to American Liberty, to be Apprehended from Foreign Influence (New York, 1855), 66.
[55] Thomas Bangs Thorpe, A Voice to America, or The Model Republic, Its Glory, or Its Fall (New York: Edward Walker, 1855), 13.
[56] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 300.
[57] Andrew Cross, Priests' Prisons for Women (Baltimore: Sherwood & Co., 1854),41.

and I can do the same!" '[58] There is another example of this theme in the anti-Catholic novel Paul and Julia (1855) by John Pitrat which opens with the dedication 'to American Protestants, who earnestly desire to transmit to their posterity the liberties and privileges bequeathed to them by their fathers – who nobly fought, bled, and died.'[59]

Some comparisons are less flattering to contemporaries. In these cases, authors wished to invoke the revolutionary past in order to shame their readers into taking action against the perceived Catholic threat to the nation. In The Convent's Doom, the Truckman and the hero, Henry, contrast the present unfavourably with the present:

> 'Do you suppose our fathers fought on yonder hill to give their country to priestcraft and nunneries?'
>
> 'No, they thought not that within sight of Bunker Hill, where the blood of heroes flowed, a Convent would be established, and their granddaughters become its inmates,' Henry said, looking in the direction of the hill.[60]

Ned Buntline, writing more than a decade later in 1866, argued that Americans, specifically New Yorkers, because of their toleration of Roman Catholicism and its alleged incursions on American republican tradition, had ceased to honour the ideals of the republic; 'They have forgotten the Puritan fathers – they have forgotten the men of the Revolution.'[61] The extracts above suggest that the authors of the convent narratives feared that the ideological gains of the War of Independence were being eroded.

Another historical event which the convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s depicted was the burning of the Ursuline Convent at Charlestown, Massachusetts, in August 1834. The Convent's Doom by Charles Frothingham (1854) is a fictional account of the burning, which Frothingham depicted as a justified and successful attempt to rescue an immured nun. The incident was also mentioned in other

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[58] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 12, 18.
[59] John Claudius Pitrat, Paul and Julia; or, The Political Mysteries, Hypocrisy, and Cruelty of the Leaders of The Church of Rome (Boston: Edward W. Hinks and Company, 1855), 3.
[60] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 12.
[61] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 74.

narratives, which did not go so far as to identify with the rioters, but which sympathized with their hatred of the institution, and which tended to justify its destruction.

The narratives of the 1850s, in describing this event, inevitably reminded readers of the most famous narratives of the 1830s, Rebecca Reed's Six Months in a Convent (1835) and Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery (1836.) As described in Chapter 2, Reed lived in the Ursuline convent for a short period and her narrative of cruel treatment at the convent, spread by word of mouth and published serially in 1834 before publication in book form in 1835, was a catalyst for the burning while also influencing public opinion regarding convents in the aftermath of the burning. Monk's narrative, which was probably written by the Reverend J.J. Slocum using Monk's name, sold even more copies, was far more lurid and created even more scandal even than Reed's best-seller. Monk accused the Catholic priesthood of Montreal of murder, rape and incest, among other crimes. These narratives both sold immensely well and were still remembered in the 1850s and 1860s, even though Monk's story had been discredited. The political concerns demonstrated in these earlier narratives influenced and found echoes in the narratives of the later period.

Monk's narrative emphasized the alleged Catholic lust for temporal power. The text describes the response of the Hôtel Dieu convent to a series of election riots; in Canada, it claimed, the Catholic hierarchy was secretly arming itself for an unknown, and nefarious purpose: 'I saw uncommon movements in some parts of the Nunnery, and ascertained, to my own satisfaction, that there was a large quantity of gunpowder stored in some secret place within the walls, and that some of it was removed, or prepared for use, under the direction of the Superior.'[62] If the Catholic church could

[62] Maria Monk, Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery, (New York: Howe & Bates, 1836), 113.

secretly arm itself in Canada, the narrative implied, it could do the same in the United States.

Monk's text also claimed that priests attached special importance to converting Americans: 'Cases in which the citizens of the States were said to have been converted to the Roman Catholic faith were sometimes spoken of, and always as if they were considered highly important.'[63] Monk's narrative implied a two-pronged attack, employing proselytism and gunpowder, by the Catholic church on the security of the United States.

Maria Monk's story had been discredited by the end of the 1830s and she died in prison after being arrested in a brothel. Her narrative was therefore less helpful to anti-Catholic writers than Reed's as evidence of Catholic iniquity. However, the Reverend Hiram Mattison still managed to use her story to attack Catholicism on the grounds of hypocrisy. He argued in 1868 that Monk was regarded by the church as a 'good Catholic, and even a "sister" without rebuke, till she unveiled the impurities of Roman Catholic nunneries. *Then* she was little better than a demon.'[64] Thus, even by the late 1860s, at the end of the period under discussion, the narratives of the 1830s were still being used as source material by anti-Catholic campaigners.

The convent narratives also portrayed the next significant milestone of anti-Catholicism in the United States, the riots in Philadelphia in 1844 between Protestants and Catholics, in conflict over various issues, including that of Bible-reading in public schools.[65] Orvilla Belisle's The Arch Bishop (1855) interprets the rioting as a victory for republicanism:

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[63] Monk, Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery, 86.
[64] Mattison, The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, 73.
[65] See Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964 [1938]), chapter 9, 220-237.

> In that hour the foes of the Republic, as they saw their fairest churches enveloped in flames, saw that they had underestimated the inborn values of the people. Hatred of the truth, and the intelligence which pervaded all classes, and with its searching rays laid bare their own dark designs, had blinded them to the uncompromising virtues which these people had received in all their original purity, from their Puritan fathers.'[66]

For Belisle, the events of 1844 offered a lesson that the continuing threat of Catholicism was serious enough to justify violent resistance. While the riots appear to have involved Protestant and Catholic immigrants, they were depicted as a conflict between Americans and Catholics.

As demonstrated above, the convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s used the events of the past to influence their readers, while interpreting historical events as a series of threats and challenges to the republic's values. This interpretation of the past reinforced the view that such threats were endemic and that the true republican had to be ever-vigilant against anti-republican forces and the Catholic church.

The conspiracy in the present

In addition to evoking historical events, the narratives of the 1850s also addressed current political controversies. In the main they concentrated on those related to nativism and Know-Nothingism, e.g. naturalization, election fraud and education, while also referring to other controversies including the slavery issue.

The Know-Nothings, also known as the American Party, enjoyed widespread (if temporary) electoral success in 1854 and 1855, campaigning on a platform of limiting immigration, restricting office to native-born Americans, and imposing a twenty-one year naturalization period, among other demands. The party enjoyed rapid growth as a

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[66] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 242.

response to the explosion of Catholic immigration from Ireland and Germany in the 1850s. Adherents expressed doubts as to whether the new immigrants could participate responsibly in democracy. Their rhetoric drew heavily on the tradition of republicanism and they claimed to be fighting to reinstate the values of the early nation; for example, the nativist William Brownlow claimed that 'To rescue and restore American institutions – to maintain American nationality, and to secure American birthrights, is the mission and the sole purpose of the AMERICAN PARTY.'[67] The success of the party was short-lived; it split in 1855 over slavery, following the sectional north-south fault line.

The success of the Know-Nothings has been interpreted as a protest against the two-party system; Holt has argued that 'South and North, hundreds of thousands embraced Know Nothingism as a vehicle of reform because of its clearly expressed purpose to destroy both old parties, drive hack politicians from office, and return political power directly to the people.'[68] In this interpretation, disillusionment with the established parties reached a critical level when, in the 1852 presidential election, both parties wooed Irish immigrants with differing degrees of success. The Democrats had traditionally attracted the support of Irish immigrants, who, in the main, remained loyal to the party while the Whigs' attempts seemed a little too opportunistic to seem genuine. The convent narratives frequently depicted this apparent abandonment of principle for political gain, which suggested their authors' disenchantment, not only with the incorrigibly Catholic-friendly Democrats, but also with the Whigs. Know-Nothingism was regularly promoted and praised by the convent narratives published in these years. The success of the Know-Nothings indicates that their supporters felt that the

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[67] William G. Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism and Bogus Democracy in the light of reason, history, and Scripture: in which certain demagogues in Tennessee, and elsewhere, are shown up in their true colors (Nashville, printed for the author, 1856), 10.
[68] Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s, 166-167

established parties did not meet their needs and it is clear that the anti-convent writers who praised them shared this dissatisfaction.

Charles Frothingham's novel The Convent's Doom (1854) was written both to criticize convents and, perhaps primarily, to promote the Know-Nothing cause through the medium of an adventure story. It purported to be a true account of the burning of the Ursuline convent in Charlestown in 1834. However, both the style and the many basic errors of fact suggest that the tale is purest fiction. It is dedicated 'to the K.N. Fraternity throughout the Unites States' and presents the burning as the action of a secret yet virtuous society enjoying widespread popular support.[69] This society is clearly intended to parallel Know-Nothingism and the burning is presented throughout in approving terms as the work of a diverse group of badly wronged stout-hearted republicans – an idealized view of the Know-Nothings, as if transported back in time. The fictional society, though, bears no real resemblance to the Know-Nothings excepting its nativism. The character of the Truckman, a leader of the secret society, describes its aims: 'The object is the downfall of the Convent, and no one can become a member unless he has suffered by priest craft.' This was a description quite at odds with the reality of Know-Nothingism. Frothingham created a more sympathetic portrait of the movement he mirrored by suggesting that members of this society were actuated by personal grievances. He also suggested that the membership was 'respectable'; 'Four of the members of our society are influential men, and hold high positions.'[70] The story ends happily; the convent is destroyed but no-one is injured, the heroine is saved, and the Catholic villains are hounded out of the United States. These events are all outcomes of the actions of the mysterious secret society. In this work Frothingham

[69] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 4.
[70] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 14, 18.

argued that 'American' values could triumph over Romanism, if Know-Nothing methods were used. It was a both a manifesto and a call to arms.

It is significant that the story of the Ursuline convent was well enough known both by readers, and, crucially, by an opportunist and populist writer, like Frothingham, to be adopted and adapted for use in other campaigns. Frothingham's work was very popular, according to the publisher's preface to the fifth edition:

> The extraordinary success of the Stories published in this little book – of which more than 40,000 copies were sold, within ten days after publication in their original form – can only be accounted for, by the peculiar feeling which just now agitates the community at large, and from the fact that the leading story gives a history of the causes which led to the burning of the Nunnery at Charlestown, in 1834.[71]

The publisher suggested that current events were of particular importance in explaining the popularity of Frothingham's stories which purported to deal with historical events.

The Haunted Convent (1854), another story by Frothingham, also revolved around political themes. This story was set in 1854 and referred to the American party. A Catholic priest displays a frightening knowledge of this party, asking a politician: 'Did you not once belong to the so-called Native American party, which flourished some years since?' Frothingham describes the way in which 'the priest drew a thick volume from his pocket, and scanned the names which were written therein closely.'[72] This scene suggested that the Catholic church was carrying out surveillance of its opponents with the aim of subverting, and possibly victimizing them. Anti-Catholic writers warned that such espionage was not carried out merely in the public sphere but also in the private, by trusted family servants. The anti-Catholic lecturer Joseph Berg stated that 'I am disposed to believe that the religious preferences of every family in [Philadelphia],

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[71] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 3.
[72] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 21.

having Roman Catholic servants in their employ, are well known to every priest.'[73] The Convent's Doom contains a scene in which an Irish Catholic servant spies on her employers at the behest of her priest – she is 'a stout, vulgar-looking woman, whose accent proclaimed her Irish. She...quitted her work and stole, unperceived, to the back of [her employer's] chair to listen.'[74] In Julia McNair Wright's story Priest and Nun (1869), a nun disguises herself as a servant in order to spy on her employers:

> Sister Clement, labouring as maid-servant Annette, gathered every item of information afloat in the house. She tampered with letters, listened at the door, explored drawers, and in the present instance had relieved the pocket of Mr. Wynford's duster of one epistle, and read another carelessly left in his hat.[75]

This surveillance by servants was both an illustration of a real contemporary fear and a symbol of alleged Catholic surveillance of the United States. These authors also feared direct action by servants. Hiram Mattison stated in The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith (1868) that 'there is little doubt that hundreds of children of Protestants are secretly taken to Catholic priests by servant girls, and baptized by them, and their names put on record, of which the parents have not the slightest knowledge or suspicion.'[76] While there is no evidence to suggest this claim was true, Mattison's allegations evoked fears that were both religious and political.

Frothingham was not the only author to promote Know Nothingism in a novel. The Mysterious Marriage (1854) satirized opponents of the Know Nothings and the Native American party. It portrays Mr. 'Jeemes Gorgon Nesbitt', a highly unflattering and transparent caricature of the Catholic editor of the New York Herald, James Gordon Bennett. Catholic plotters bribe Nesbitt to print an inflammatory defence of

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[73] Rev. Joseph F. Berg, A Lecture Delivered in the Musical Fund Hall, on Monday Evening, December 23rd, 1850, on the Jesuits (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1850), 25.
[74] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 5.
[75] Wright, Priest and Nun, 85.
[76] Mattison, The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, 113.

so-called religious freedom and calls for 'a great public demonstration in the Park, or Battery.' This event is accordingly publicized with a notice asking 'whether a certain class shall be subjected to the dangers of slaughter and persecution from the deadly assaults of members of the Nativist, and other bigoted secret societies organized in our midst.' The author notes that 'this flaming poster had the effect to draw together… a concourse of some two or three thousand "*citizens*," the majority of whom spent their last Christmas in Connaught and Tipperary.'[77] The author anticipated and answered critics of nativism by alleging that the unprincipled Church of Rome was taking advantage of the American impulse to offer freedoms to immigrants who were, it was implied, unfit to take advantage of them.

The Know Nothings believed that it was too easy for immigrants to become naturalized citizens of the United States, and that priests and demagogues were bribing, or otherwise improperly encouraging immigrants, particularly Irish Catholic immigrants, to vote in a particular way. They claimed that Catholic clergy were effectively offering immigrants' votes for sale in exchange for privileges and power. Nativists feared that this undermined the republican virtue of the nation and fostered corruption among native-born politicians and officials. Know Nothings and nativists also believed that Catholic immigrants were becoming too powerful as a result and that the liberties of Americans were in danger. Thomas Bangs Thorpe, writing in 1855, attacked the 'American Demagogue' as a 'shameless monster' whose 'business is to obtain office and honors by corrupting the people.' According to Thorpe, 'the slime of his contact can be traced among the members of the bar, in the pulpit, in our legislative assemblies.'[78] The following year, William Brownlow wrote 'The *bastard* Democracy of the present age has united with the Prelates, Priests, Monks, and Nuns of Romanism, and is daily affiliating

[77] Eliza Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, n.d. [circa 1853]), 98.
[78] Thorpe, A Voice to America, 237, 241.

with hundreds of thousands of the very off-scourings of the European Catholic population – stimulating them to deeds of violence, and to the shedding of blood!'[79]

The convent narratives reflect this perception. The Convent and the Manse (1853) included a satirical description of a corrupt politician who has sent his daughter to school at a convent:

> "Did you not know, my dear girl, that Pa is a candidate for Governor?" asked Mary. "He is a good, kind father, and would sacrifice anything for his children, but his ambition…When my father was a candidate for the same office before, he…and several other friends, all at once discovered that they had been greatly deceived in their opinions of the Catholics. They suddenly found that they were an abused people, who hardly enjoyed toleration among us, and that something ought to be done to ease the minds of their clergy with regard to the use of the Bible in the public schools. The next thing my father ascertained was, that no schools in the country could send out perfectly accomplished scholars but convent-schools."[80]

Danger in the Dark (1854) also criticized opportunist politicians. An anti-Catholic character, Squire Delmont, warns that there exists 'a set of selfish, dishonest, renegade politicians, who have no other hope of climbing into office than by becoming fawning sycophants, [and] think to ingratiate themselves with papists.'[81] The Haunted Convent (1855) another story by Charles Frothingham, was equally concerned with the threat posed to the United States by corrupt politicians who collaborate with the Catholic interest. The heroine's father, Mr. Abbot, is such a politician, and tells a sinister priest, Father McFaley, that 'I need not tell you how anxious I am to be elected, nor the exertions I have made to get the nomination. I have been liberal with my money, and will be still more so, provided I can get the Catholic vote.' Father McFaley describes to Mr. Abbot the extensive surveillance carried out by him and his fellow clergy:

> Each priest in orders is obliged to keep an accurate account of the doings of the public men in the United States, whether for or against Popery.

[79] Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, 8.
[80] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 136.
[81] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 45.

> This book contains the names and doings of every man in this State who has held a public office, or made a public speech. I report to the bishop, the bishop to the archbishop, and from him we receive orders how to act.[82]

Here Frothingham suggested that Catholic priest were monitoring politicians closely in order to better manipulate them.

In these examples, the political process is undermined and manipulated by scheming priests who take advantage of politicians' greed and ambition to consolidate their power. These caricatures of politicians were, perhaps, designed to remind readers of politicians with Catholic links, like the Whig politician General Winfield Scott, an Episcopalian; two of his daughters were practising Catholics, which may have damaged his 1852 Presidential campaign.[83] Such attacks were common in anti-Catholic literature; for example, William Brownlow's polemic Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism and Bogus Democracy (1856) described his view of the relationship between the Pope (caricatured as an old man, but actually only 64 – young for a Pope even in the nineteenth century) and American demagogues:

> Its old *goutified*, immoral, and drunken Pope, his Bishops and Priests, are *politicians;* men of the world, earthly, sensual, and devilish, and mere men of pleasure. Associated with them for the purpose, in great State and National contests, of securing the Catholic vote, are the worst class of American politicians, designing demagogues, selfish office-seekers, and bad men, calling themselves *Democrats* and "Old-Line Whigs!" These politicians know that Popery, as a system, is in the hands of a Foreign despotism.[84]

Anti-Catholic commentators argued that the influx of immigrants had undermined the electoral process by giving undue power to demagogues who could easily sway the

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[82] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 21.
[83] Hugh Brogan, The Pelican History of the United States of America (London: Pelican, 1986 [1985],) 309. Scott's youngest daughter, Marcella, married Charles Carroll MacTavish (a connection of Charles Carroll, the signatory of the Declaration of Independence) in a ceremony performed by Archbishop John Hughes in 1841. His eldest daughter, Virginia, entered a convent in Georgetown against her parents' wishes in 1844. She died of tuberculosis within less than a year. See Alan Peskin, Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003), 128.
[84] Brownlow, Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, 7.

suggestible and ignorant Irish hordes. The Chicago Tribune published a censorious description of one election in 1856:

> At the Seventh Ward, Irishmen were seen after having voted, to fall into the ranks and work their way up to the window and vote again, while around the polls stood a wild, excited mob of a thousand Celts, threatening death to all who oppose them…A great many swore in their votes who were unnaturalized, and when the Bible was held to them, grasping it, they kissed their thumbs instead of the holy book, and by this dodge eased their tender consciences.[85]

It was not merely politicians who had been corrupted, according to these writers. Ned Buntline's novel The Beautiful Nun (1866) argued that police and firemen, among other city employees, had been undermined by easy naturalization and favouritism among Irish immigrants. He also portrayed Irish immigrants employed in such capacities as ignorant of American ways and culture and, by extension, ignorant of American republicanism. The novel's American hero is 'borne off in triumph to a *prison* by [Irish Catholic] men who neither understand or respect our laws – who have no affinity by birth of feeling with us, who are in truth, though in the *employ* of the city of New York, only the *minions* of the Pope of Rome.'[86] Buntline argued that city employees, who should be loyal to the nation, were made the tools of their priests.

Similarly, authors argued that justice, in addition to the electoral system and public service, was undermined by the power exerted by Catholic clergy. In the anti-Catholic novel The Mysterious Marriage (c.1853) the evil Archbishop of New York (presumably intended to evoke Archbishop John Hughes who had been appointed to this office in 1850) plots to manipulate the jury system to frame an innocent man.

> "What better testimony," as the Arch-Bishop argued to himself, "would be needed for a New York jury, or a jury of any country, which by adroit management could be composed of two thirds Catholics, to convict, the person whose the knife bore of the murder, especially when among the

[85] Chicago Tribune, March 28, 1856, in Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery : The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 117-118.
[86] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 74.

> Jesuits, witnesses could be produced those who would swear to anything their priest might consider as corroborative of the main accusation."[87]

Frothingham depicts a society where justice cannot be obtained against Catholic machinations because 'Jesuit gold is powerful.' Before the authorities instituted a search of the Ursuline convent, according to the Truckman,

> Word would first be sent to the Convent that a party intended to visit the place and do you suppose they have no secret chambers to hide those they wish to conceal. I have tried it, and was treated like a madman because I dared to bring charges against the pious monks of St. Ursuline [sic.][88]

Sarah Richardson's narrative claimed that even in the United States, having fled the Grey Nunnery in Montreal, she was not safe from Canadian priests. She described their powers, ending with a clear warning to Americans:

> They were bound to get me, at all events, and if I had stopped there until they despaired of catching me secretly, they would undoubtedly have come with an officer, and accused me of some crime, as a pretext for taking me away. Then, had any one been so far interested for me as to insist on my having a fair trial, how easy for them to produce witnesses enough to condemn me! Those priests have many ways to accomplish their designs. The American people don't know them yet; God grant they never may.[89]

Hiram Mattison claimed in 1868 that 'the Protestant lawyers of New York – many of them, at least – say that there is no chance for justice in that city, in *any* matter where the interests of Romanism are involved.'[90] In Priest and Nun (1869) by Julia McNair Wright, a character asks 'Have you never heard of supreme judges promising their interest to the Church as the price of the election? I have.'[91]

A further controversial issue carrying political implications was education, and, more specifically, the issue of Bible-reading in public schools, particularly in the 1840s

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[87] Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage, 69.
[88] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 12.
[89] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 180.
[90] Mattison, The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, 123.
[91] Wright, Priest and Nun, 219.

and 1850s. The movement to establish Catholic schools with state money was seized on by those who believed that Catholics were forbidden to read the Bible, and that Romanism perpetuated ignorance and hindered learning, as evidence of Catholic repression. The movement directly inspired at least one convent narrative, according to Isaac Kelso, the author of Danger in the Dark (1854) who wrote that 'the crusade so lately led on by the Romish clergy against our admirable Free-School system, first suggested the thought of writing a book of this description.'[92] Orvilla Belisle similarly dedicated The Arch Bishop (1855) to this cause; "To the American people who have the perpetuity and prosperity of our institutions at heart: to those who are opposed to the suppressions of the Bible in public schools and legislative halls, of free thought, free speech, and a free press, this volume is respectfully dedicated by the author."[93]

Of less immediate relevance to anti-Catholicism, but still vitally important, was slavery, the defining political issue of the 1850s and the most divisive. James McPherson argues, with regard to the slavery issue, 'The ideology of republicanism had also become more divisive than unifying, for most northerners interpreted it in a free-labor mode while most southerners insisted that one of the most cherished tenets of republican liberty was the right to property – including property in slaves.'[94] The convent narratives of the 1850s took different positions regarding the anti-slavery movement – mirroring the split in the Know-Nothing party on the same issue, which itself reflected the division within the nation. Irish Catholics were widely portrayed as pro-slavery, engendering hostility among opponents of slavery. For example, the Providence Herald claimed in 1854 that 'the foreign and Catholic influence have been

[92] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, v.
[93] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, v.
[94] James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (London: Penguin 1990 [1988]), 40.

for years on the side of slavery, and doing all in their power to sustain the South against the North.'[95]

Southern writers tended to stridently defend slavery. Edward Goodwin in Lily White (1858) accused anti-slavery writers of distorting reality for propaganda purposes; 'Here was to be seen none of that misery and wretchedness, that cruel treatment and inhuman conduct, that *modern fanatics* represent as existing on almost every Southern plantation. The Southern farmer has been insulted and outraged by the foulest and blackest slanders that could be fabricated by the meanest malignity.'[96] Augusta Evans, author of the anti-Catholic novel Inez: A Tale of the Alamo (1855) described a slave 'whose tidy appearance, and honest, happy smiling face presented the best refutation of the gross slanders of our northern brethren' and wished 'that her daguerreotype…could be contrasted with those of the miserable, half-starved seamstresses of Boston and New York.'[97] Another novel by Evans, Macaria; or, The Altars of Sacrifice, published in Richmond in 1864, attributed the outbreak of war to 'the surging waves of Northern faction and fanaticism already break[ing] ominously against our time-honored constitutional dykes.'[98] Evans and Goodwin argued that Northern extremism constituted a deliberate plot against the freedoms of the republic.

The northern writers did not tend to refer to slavery explicitly in the convent narratives. However they linked the fate of the nun, supposedly immured against her will, with that of the slave; both had had their freedom stolen. Cara Belmont's novel The City Side (1854) included the brief narrative of an escaped nun who describes her time in the convent in terms of bondage; she says 'I pass over the first six months of my

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[95] Providence Herald, December 25, 1854, in Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery, 46.
[96] Goodwin, Lily White, 20.
[97] Augusta Evans, Inez, A Tale of the Alamo (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), 42.
[98] Augusta Evans, Macaria; or, The Altars of Sacrifice (Richmond: West & Johnston, 1864), 89.

slavery.'[99] Bunkley's narrative claimed in 1855 that the convent is a place where 'slavery [is] enforced by the vows of the society.' The image of bondage obviously recalls Southern slavery; it also evokes the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. To evoke slavery is to evoke the ultimate tyranny.

Slavery was the only political issue on which there was any real differentiation in opinion between convent narratives, which were otherwise remarkably homogeneous in opinion, if not in emphasis. The slavery controversy, however, may be seen as a special case – it was slavery which figuratively divided the nation, and which (among many other factors) literally divided it during the Civil War. In any case, narratives adopting either position continued to manifest Hofstadter's 'paranoia' and suspicion of the 'enemy.'

In the 1860s, the number of convent narratives published in the United States declined. The crisis of the Civil War deflected much attention from religious controversy and the debate on immigration, possibly reflecting approval of the Irish troops fighting for the Union (although there is no specific evidence to suggest this) until the New York draft riots when Irish immigrants rioted against conscription. The draft riots do not appear to have directly influenced the authors of the later convent narratives, as there are no references to it. The riots may have compounded an already-present sense that Irish immigrants were 'un-American' but they do not appear to have added any further dimension to the texts studied here. However, Ned Buntline's novel The Beautiful Nun, published in 1866, illustrated the continuing, if diminished, tendency to associate Catholicism with the nation's political ills. Buntline's story depicted Catholic clerics plotting to cause the Civil War itself: 'We can never gain a firm foothold here, while the States remain *united* and friendly. Disunite them, disorganize them, cause

[99] Cara Belmont, The City Side; or, Passages from a Pastor's Portfolio (Boston: Phillips, Samson and Company, 1854), 253.

a civil war, and on the ruins of their wrecked Republic we could build and firmly establish our Empire.'[100] Twelve years earlier, in Danger in the Dark (1854), Isaac Kelso had presaged the Civil War and reflected the divisions in the nation, also linking the Catholic church to internecine struggle; 'Bishop Constantius' argues that 'we must kindle the fires of contention, distract and divide the Union, so that it falls and easy prey to papal power…We already see a clashing of interest between the north and south, which must tend to disrupture the bonds of the Union, and one day render it an easy matter to prick them on a bloody conflict.'[101]

This is not to suggest that anyone took such claims seriously. Yet the connection of the civil war - the bloody and fratricidal conflict which had devastated the nation – to the power of Rome, vague though it was, illustrated the persistence of the myth that the Pope was actively working to undermine the American republic.

Foreign corruption

Awareness of foreign power, and the potential threat posed by this power, was a strong theme of the convent narratives. The United States was born of a war in which political leaders negotiated with foreign powers for support, and diplomatic considerations were rarely far from the thoughts of the nation's government or from political discourse. After the war, the country's vulnerability - economic, political, and military – engendered a strong consciousness of potential threats from abroad. This was strengthened by conflicts with France and Britain in the early years of the republic, as well as the vast immigration from Europe. In the convent narratives this foreign

[100] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 55.
[101] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 113.

power was recast as malignancy, deviousness and ambition, warning readers against foreign people, ideas and institutions.

The convent narratives portrayed the United States as the most enlightened nation in the world, endowed with a host of virtues and rewarded with wisdom and prosperity. Many Americans, taking their cue from Enlightenment writers as well as Puritan divines who interpreted America as a land embodying Christian virtue, viewed their national history as one of natural progression and improvement. This conviction was assailed, however, by doubts over the security of the nation and its virtue. In these texts, foreign neighbours of the United States threatened contamination. Virtuous native born Americans are contrasted with the foreign individuals who enter the United States with the avowed aim of converting Americans to Catholicism. For example, the hero of the novel Viola by William Earle Binder (1858) is 'of pure American blood. For generations back all his ancestors had been American Protestants.'[102] Similarly, Mary Ann Smith, who was allegedly abducted by a Catholic priest and imprisoned in a home for fallen women, was described in 1868 as 'of Irish parentage, but altogether American in conversation and manners.'[103]

Foreign influences on Americans, especially young people, are viewed as pernicious. Sarah Richardson's father, according to her narrative, had a Catholic upbringing in Dublin: 'an education in accordance with the strictest rules of Roman Catholic faith and practice.'[104] Thereafter he enters a downward spiral of poverty and alcoholism. The pro-American, anti-foreign emphasis of the convent narratives encourages the reader to distrust people, institutions and ideas associated with foreign nations, and the Catholic church is the main target.

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[102] William Earle Binder, Viola (New York: Evans and Company, 1858), 58.
[103] Mattison, The Abduction of Mary Ann Smith, 6.
[104] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 1.

In the American convent narratives, most Catholic authority figures are of foreign birth – usually Irish, French or Italian. This further implies Catholic incursion. Nuns are also easier to corrupt, and more ready to corrupt others, when they come from Europe, according to the texts. This was illustrated by Bunkley in 1855:

> The next day I observed that she went to confession to this priest, and no doubt she was pleased, for she remained in the confessional three hours. Probably she wished to go to a person who would address her such questions as she would take satisfaction in answering. This sister was a French person, and one whom I had often noticed in the corridor conversing with the priests. She also frequented their apartment.

Bunkley writes of another nun that 'the mistress of novices was of foreign birth, very astute in her perceptions, keen, shrewd, and penetrating.'[105]

Anti-Catholic texts argued that Catholic rule demoralized the populace, and that this accounted for many of the ills of Catholic countries and of American cities where there were large Catholic populations, like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. In Madelon Hawley (1857), Father Huestace, an evil Jesuit, describes the absolutism of Catholic countries – 'lands where the Church acknowledges no law but her own sovereign will; obeys no master's but her own Superior's; and bends to no circumstances, but that of her own making; and where not one, from the king upon his throne, to the beggar on the highway, dares think or act independent of her expressed or even implied will.'[106] Anti-convent authors argued that because of Catholic repression, the inhabitants of Catholic countries were ignorant and led immoral lives, and that this rendered them unfit to challenge Catholic supremacy. For example, in The Convent and the Manse (1853), the heroines' father returns from travelling in Europe and describes Catholic countries; 'My heart is made sick by what I see and hear of the spiritual despotism exercised over the people.' The author argued that 'let the poor

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[105] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 155, 177.
[106] Binder, Madelon Hawley, 135, 167.

emigrants be educated and kindly treated, and they will make good citizens. But, when they in such masses remain ignorant, they are a dangerous people, because they are the tools of designing men, who aim at the subversion of our liberties.'[107] This was further suggested by the description of a Catholic congregation in Madelon Hawley; 'I fancied that I could trace in each gaping countenance only ignorance, grossness, superstition and bigotry.'[108] Isaac Kelso stated, in Danger in the Dark (1854) that 'wherever Popery extends its jurisdiction, and exercises a controlling influence…there every onward movement is checked, liberal philosophy, mental freedom and development discountenanced – and an extinguisher placed upon the lamp of science.'[109] The theme continued in the 1860s; for example The Beautiful Nun (1866) depicts 'Italy! land of sunshine and of flowers; by the hand of GOD made beautiful; by the hand of *man*, left desolate!'[110] For Buntline, the influence of Roman Catholicism had pervaded Italian life and corrupted it.

The closest foreign country, Canada, was generally equated with Quebec. In Canada, the convent narratives suggested, the Catholic church had usurped the rule of law. Richardson wrote that, having escaped to Vermont, 'I knew I could not remain so near Montreal in safety...Sure I am, that any protection [the selectmen] could offer me, would not, in the least degree, shield me from the secret intrigue, the affectionate, maternal embrace of holy Mother Church.'[111] Canada is also a place of refuge for Catholic clerics who have been driven out of the United States, as in The Convent's Doom (1855); 'Father McCaley and the treacherous Bridget fled to Canada, where they entered a convent in Montreal, and where they intend to remain, as they were too much

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[107] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 190, 147.
[108] Binder, Madelon Hawley, 176.
[109] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 229.
[110] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 19.
[111] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 171.

frightened that night to ever return to the United States again.'[112] Apart from the impossibility of Father McCaley entering a convent of nuns, this extract, while designed to safely remove two villains, actually evokes the sense that they remain close to the United States, and could, if sufficiently emboldened, easily return, to begin once again to undermine American values and institutions. In the finale of another story by Frothingham, McFaley, a wicked priest (the paucity of Frothingham's imagination is symbolized by the similarity both between the priests' names and their eventual fates) 'settled permanently in Montreal.'[113]

The examples above show that the convent narratives associated Catholicism with 'foreignness' and corruption. They linked Catholicism with the problems encountered in European countries and Canada. They depicted the effects of Catholic power in other countries to illustrate the possible consequences of Catholic power on communities in America and to warn of the probable breakdown of the American republic, should Catholicism ever gain an ascendancy over the people.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to show that the American convent narratives of 1850-1870 demonstrated the political beliefs of their authors, consciously or otherwise; that these beliefs were infused with apprehension for the future of the republic and its values; and that these writers feared the virtuous republic would give way to a nation ruled by corrupt demagogues or, even worse, papal autocracy. It has been demonstrated that these authors were deeply attached to the republicanism of the American Revolution. Their political ideas were remarkably homogeneous. While the narratives differed on

[112] Frothingham, The Convent's Doom, 19.
[113] Frothingham, The Haunted Convent, 32.

the slavery issue (one camp using slavery as a metaphor for Catholic oppression, and another resenting anti-slavery as a Northern movement designed to undermine the south), this was the only real area of divergence.

In their texts, these authors revealed their fears for the future of the United States. They believed that their nation was under threat from devious and manipulative enemies who hated the United States and the liberties it stood for. It is clear, therefore, that the anti-convent movement of the 1850s and 1860s manifested the paranoid mindset identified by Hofstadter and David Brion Davis. Anti-Catholicism, of course, was an early source for this paranoia and it is evident that the writers who condemned Catholic convents did so in large part because they feared Catholicism as essentially hostile to liberty. These writers denounced the forces they identified as malignant as well as conveying their suspicions through plot and character. They expressed beliefs and attitudes towards the republic that were remarkably similar, offering strong evidence that these attitudes were widespread and that they were a major contributory factor to the phenomenon of the convent narrative in the mid nineteenth-century.

These authors believed in conspiracies and plots against the nation. The following chapter will argue that this 'paranoia' was not confined to discussion of purely political matters. It will be argued that the convent narratives were equally suspicious of developments in the religious and theological sphere, and that their fears for republicanism found resonance in their fears for the future safety of Protestantism.

Chapter 6: The role of religion in the convent narrative

The previous chapter established that American convent narratives in the 1850s and 1860s expressed deep fears for the safety of the republic. This chapter aims to explore the religious beliefs which informed these texts, to discuss the relationship of religious and political ideas, and to assess the relevance of this relationship to the fear of anti-republican conspiracy manifested in the convent narratives. Religious beliefs were of vital importance to these texts, which were, inarguably, written as propaganda with the aim of furthering Protestantism. Less obvious, but of great significance, is the influence of religious ideas on the political mindset of the new republic. This chapter will analyze this relationship as it was revealed in the convent narratives of this period.

The chapter begins by examining the representation of theological differences between Protestantism and Catholicism in the convent narratives. It will be argued that these differences were used to reinforce widely-held beliefs that Catholicism was anti-republican and anti-American in character, and that Protestantism, by contrast, upheld these values. The discussion will then turn to an exploration of the growing sense of a 'Catholic menace' in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, which accompanied the resurgence of the Catholic church, and the influence of this perception on the convent narratives. The final section of the chapter will discuss the insecurity felt by many clergy and members of long-established Protestant denominations in the face of irreligion, multiplying sects, evangelicalism and revivalism, and the changing social and political status of the ministry in relation to the convent narrative genre.

The American colonies encompassed settlers of numerous Protestant sects, as well as Catholic-founded Maryland. The French and Spanish possessions were occupied by Catholic settlers, as was Quebec, ceded to Great Britain in 1763. The

hegemony of Protestantism, therefore, should not be overstated. However, it was a vitally important force. Although anti-Catholicism was probably more pronounced in the northern and eastern states, hostility to 'Popery' flourished everywhere.

The arrival of the Puritan settlers on the northern seaboard of what would become the United States was, in itself, a tangible effect of the Reformation. Orvilla Belisle described this event in her anti-convent novel The Arch Bishop (1855), writing of 'a ship, laden with humanity, [which] left [England's] ensanguined shores to seek safety among the savages of America, who were less cruel than her brothers.'[1] This extract illustrates the mythological way in which the arrival of the Puritans was viewed by nativist writers in the mid-nineteenth century. These emigrants insisted that they were fleeing persecution and sought to establish a godly society away from the evils, as they saw them, of Romanism and Anglicanism. Their loathing of Catholicism was ingrained in their culture. The Puritan settlers of the early seventeenth century hated Catholicism, both theoretically, on doctrinal grounds, and emotionally, as the dreaded source of many threats, dangers and difficulties. Even the more moderate English settlers who augmented the Puritan communities throughout the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought their own aversion to the faith. These more secular arrivals disliked Romanist doctrine. They were also characteristically more loyal to the English government and hence more opposed than Puritans to Catholicism on the grounds of its implied danger to English sovereignty, as manifested by the various military threats to England from Catholic countries and various sectarian plots.

For Puritan emigrants and their children, religious writings were everyday reading. The most important text was, of course, the Bible, but they also read other religious texts, from the works of Calvin (James D. Hart argues that 'Calvin was the

[1] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855), 16.

arbiter to whom New Englanders turned for judgment on even the small details of daily life'[2]) to Foxe's Book of Martyrs (1563). These works reinforced the anti-Catholicism promoted by church and state.

Later emigrants from other nations were equally likely to harbour anti-Catholic prejudice. The majority of pre-Revolution emigrants were from the British Isles and northern Europe, largely Protestant countries where hostility to Catholicism was ingrained, even where prejudice against Catholics was not. Billington stresses the resulting suspicion felt by Protestants towards Catholics; 'every Catholic within the colonies was looked upon as a potential enemy who might let his papal allegiance supersede his loyalty to the crown by co-operating with the armies of French Canada and Spanish Florida against the settlers.'[3]

Enlightenment suspicion of Catholicism was also influential. The new intellectual currents of the eighteenth century were not slow in reaching America; Bernard Bailyn argues that Enlightenment writers 'were quoted everywhere in the colonies.'[4] According to Sydney Ahlstrom, 'to a *philosophe* like Thomas Jefferson, the Roman Catholic church was simply the most powerful – and therefore the most dangerous – institutionalization of medieval superstition, secret narrowness, and monarchical despotism in religion.'[5] However, there was plenty of opprobrium directed against the Enlightenment writers and against those who read them. The emphasis on reason as opposed to belief was seen by many orthodox Protestants as subversive.

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[2] James D. Hart, The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 11.
[3] Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964 [1938]), 9.
[4] Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 27. Pamphlets quoting these writers include James Otis, Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved (Boston, 1764); Josiah Quincy Jr., Observations on the Boston Port Bill in Josiah Quincy, Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy Jun (Boston, 1825); [Alexander Hamilton], The Farmer Refuted (New York, 1775).
[5] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 556.

Enlightenment thinking, did, though, give additional impetus to criticisms that the Catholic Church discouraged inquiry among its adherents. Protestantism, by contrast, required individual study of the Bible. This is a theme which is constantly revisited in the convent narratives. In short, Enlightenment thinking had the effect of encouraging American Protestants to attack Catholicism, while not proving powerful enough to make them reject their own reformed religion. At the same time the elevation of liberty and individual rights that occurred in the United States as a result of Enlightenment philosophy created a new set of expectations and, by extension, fears for the safety and strength of the republic. The combination of anti-Catholic national memory, Protestant spiritual hegemony and Enlightenment attacks on superstition created an environment in which anti-Catholicism was closely identified with Americanism.

During the Revolutionary War, French support was secured for the revolutionary cause, which led to the suppression of most of the overt anti-Catholicism which had been freely expressed before this point. The American nation enjoyed a detente with Catholicism which lasted, with lapses, until the early 1830s when anti-Catholic nativism became pronounced in the north-eastern states and more common in Maryland and the mid-west.

The Second Great Awakening was an important factor in the evolution of the United States in this period. The phenomena of religious revivalism and evangelicalism, typically manifested in the camp meeting, swept throughout the nation in the years following the Revolution. Participants were encouraged to believe in their own agency in achieving salvation, and to actively seek to save the souls of others, and the movement encouraged a spirit of activism which was important in the development of reforming and 'anti' movements. The Second Great Awakening significantly increased the numbers of Methodists, Baptists and other, newer, denominations, at the expense of

more traditional groups like the Congregationalists and Presbyterians.[6] This was the religious context for the upsurge in convent narratives in the mid-1830s and then later from the early 1850s until around 1870.

Theological differences between Protestantism and Catholicism

This section will look at the ways the convent narratives reflected the theological preoccupations of their authors regarding the Bible and learning, prayer and ritual, celibacy and confession, and the role of the priest. These texts demonstrate an awareness of all these issues; doctrinal questions are placed squarely at the centre of their discussion of Catholicism's ills. For these writers, the evils of Catholicism were inextricably linked to its theological basis, rather than simply attributable to wicked individuals or corrupt governance. They believed – or they at least argued - that the dangers posed by Catholicism to the American republic could be traced to the fundamental tenets of the Roman church.

The conviction that the Bible was the ultimate authority for religious questions, and that it overrode all others, was central to Protestant belief. Protestants believed that the Bible should be available to all, and should be read by individuals in order to further their understanding and faith. For Protestants, the Bible superseded the authority of any religious leader. The fact that it offered apparent contradictions, or might be hard to understand fully, only meant that it was more important for Christians to study it. In the Catholic religion, however, the Bible was in effect only one authority, standing with the Pope, church tradition, and General Council decrees as a source of rule and faith.

[6] The historiography of the Second Great Awakening is extensive; see for example Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-Over District (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950); Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People; Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Protestants believed that one of the faults of Catholicism was that it had diluted the importance of the Bible and distanced its adherents from the pure word of God. Protestant theologians from the Reformation onwards had characterized the Catholic faith as an evil anti-religion in polar opposition to the faith of the godly. This polarization encouraged some Protestant writers to distort Catholic theology to suggest that the Roman hierarchy was actively opposed to laymen reading and understanding the Bible.

The American convent narratives were deeply concerned with the primacy of scripture and the importance of Bible reading. They repeatedly insisted that the Catholic clergy was implacably opposed to Bible-reading among lay-people, even among nuns. Such views were prevalent in the early narratives of the 1830s, which influenced those of the 1850s and 1860s. It was regularly claimed that owning a Bible was a punishable offence in Catholic communities; George Bourne wrote in his novel Lorette (first published in 1833 in New York) of a Quebec curé who, on finding a Bible hidden among a dead woman's possessions, 'raged like a madman.'[7] Rebecca Reed's narrative had claimed in 1835 that 'while in the Convent I asked once or twice for a Bible, but never received any, and never saw one while there.' These books argued that Catholic priests actively discouraged and punished efforts to attain knowledge and understanding, for example in Rebecca Reed's narrative: 'The Bishop often said that the laity were not qualified to expound the Scriptures, and that the *successors* of the apostles *alone* were authorized to interpret them, &c.'[8] Maria Monk's subsequent 'true' narrative, Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery (New York, 1836) similarly suggested that the Bible was regarded within the convent as a dangerous book:

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[7] George Bourne, Lorette: Or, the History of Louise, Daughter of a Canadian Nun, Exhibiting the Interior of Female Convents (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1836 [1833]), 29.
[8] Rebecca Reed, Six Months in a Convent (Boston: Russell, Odiorne & Metcalf, 1835), 133.

> They often enlarged upon the evil tendency of that book, and told us that but for it many a soul condemned to hell, and suffering an eternal punishment, might have been in happiness. They could not say anything in its favour; for that would have been speaking against religion and against God.

Her narrative quoted a catechism as asking 'Q. Why are men not to read the New Testament? – A. Because the mind of man is too limited and weak to understand what God has written.'[9] The narrative posited a possible explanation for the alleged dislike of the Bible – 'several [Catholics] have remarked to me at different times, that if it were not for that book, Catholics would never be led to renounce their own faith.'[10]

These views remained widespread in the anti-convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s. The British novel Sister Agnes (1854; republished in New York in the same year) depicted a scheming Jesuit with designs on the fortune of a young girl who is inveigled into a convent. The Jesuit learns that the girl's nurse reads the Bible to her: ' "That woman must be removed," said the padre, authoritatively.' In consequence, 'having discarded the Bible, and possessing no friend to lead her to the fountain of living water, the thirst of her spirit consumed her, and she turned for relief to the broken cistern of superstition.'[11] Josephine Bunkley argued in 1855 that 'God's word alone can furnish that safe and unerring guidance; God's spirit only can teach infallibly the soul.'[12] She claimed that 'while a resident at St. Joseph's [Convent] I *never saw a Bible*, and I had frequent access to the library.'[13] In the same year Orvilla S. Belisle's novel The Arch-Bishop (1855) further illustrated the supposed Catholic view of the Bible; the Archbishop of the title writes a letter on the subject to the priests of his diocese:

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[9] Maria Monk, Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal (New York: Howe and Bates, 1836), 5.
[10] Monk, Awful Disclosures, 20.
[11] Anonymous, Sister Agnes; or, The Captive Nun. A Picture of Convent Life. By a clergyman's widow (New York: Riker, Thorne & Co., 1854), 25, 59.
[12] Josephine Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book: Testimony of an Escaped Novice (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855), 18.
[13] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 225.

> I find to my great sorrow that thousands of the true faith dare rashly to read and interpret for themselves the Bible…Therefore you are hereafter commanded to search every family under your respective charges, and wherein one of these, or other heretical books are found, of whatsoever version, to destroy it without delay.[14]

The notion that Catholicism was antithetical to lay people reading the Bible was still current in 1869; in Julia McNair Wright's novel of that year, Priest and Nun, the novel's protagonist asks a nun 'Saint Cecelia, is it very wicked to read the Bible?' She is told 'Certainly, for the Church forbids it.'[15] For Protestants, denying access to the Word of God was a great evil. Throughout this period anti-convent authors argued that the Catholic church was guilty of this crime.

When these propagandists stated that the Catholic church prevented its adherents from reading the Bible - the source, for Protestants, of all wisdom and learning - they also implied that the Church of Rome was opposed to all forms of 'enlightenment', i.e. progress in industry, social welfare, government administration and so on, as well as inhibiting knowledge and learning. The convent narratives portray Catholicism as condemning its adherents to ignorance and misery, in contrast to the Protestant ideals of learning and self-improvement. These ideas helped to demonize Catholicism as archaic and backward-looking, and, by extension, linked Protestantism with wisdom, learning and social improvement. The anti-Catholic novel Paul and Julia (1855) written by John Claudius Pitrat, an ex-priest, depicted the life of monks, and amplified this theme. The hero, Paul, is told by a monk, his instructor, that

> The priests, your teachers, have stopped the development of your intellect, because science would have led you astray to perdition; they have forbidden you to use your reason, because our holy and only true church does not allow the faithful to think, judge, and believe for

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[14] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855), 25.
[15] Julia McNair Wright, Priest and Nun (Philadelphia: Crittenden & McKinney, 1869), 75.

> themselves, but binds them to mould their thoughts, judgments, and belief on those of the clergy.[16]

In the same year another anti-Catholic novel, Modern Pilgrims (1855), described the effects of a convent education on one unfortunate Catholic woman:

> It seemed as if the spirit of her religion was to know nothing but what she learned of Father Hildebrand. The leaden skull-cap of an eminent, so-called, Catholic faith acted an extinguisher upon every aspiration of her soul. The tree of knowledge, in the Romish church, is still the forbidden fruit, of which to eat is to die.[17]

According to Sarah Richardson's supposedly factual narrative Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (1858), '[The] desire to investigate the subject -- to seek for more light -- more knowledge in the way of salvation by Christ...with the Romanists, is a great sin.'[18] In Priest and Nun (1869), Paradise Lost is called ' an indecent, false and shameful book' by the priest Father Murphy, who on being confronted with John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress – for Protestant Americans, a book emblematic of simplicity, piety and godliness - 'trembled, stamped, quivered and choked with rage.'[19]

The authors of convent narratives argued for the importance of understanding prayers and offices, rather than merely repeating them, as they claimed was the case in Catholic worship. In 1835, Reed's narrative had claimed that nuns were prevented from understanding Latin prayers: 'Before eating, one of the Religieuse [sic] said, "In nomine domini nostri Jesu Christe"...When opportunity offered, I asked the Superior to explain the meaning. She said, in a very solemn manner, "You must not, dear Sister, give way to *curiosity*..."[20] While the author uses terms incorrectly and displays his or her ignorance of the correct form of Catholic worship, the objective is clearly to demonstrate the

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[16] Paul Pitrat, Paul and Julia (Boston: E.W. Hinks and Company, 1855), 67.
[17] George Wood, Modern Pilgrims: Showing the Improvements in Travel, and the Newest Methods of Reaching the Celestial City (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1855), 259.
[18] Sarah Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal. An authentic narrative of the horrors, mysteries, and cruelties of convent life. (Boston: Damrell & Moore, 1858), 72.
[19] Wright, Priest and Nun, 145.
[20] Reed, Six Months in a Convent, 74-75.

impenetrability of its prayers. This perception of Catholicism as inhibiting understanding and promoting ignorance continued in the 1850s and 1860s. The novel The Convent and the Manse (1853) depicted Catholic prayers as holding little meaning for the majority of their auditors: 'During the long Latin prayers, which were unmeaning at least to Mrs. Latour and the domestics, Isabel remained apart; for she honored religion too highly to join in what she considered solemn mockery.'[21] In 1858 Richardson's narrative demonstrated her imperfect understanding of Latin ceremony:

> I was then led to the chapel, and passing up the aisle, knelt before the altar. Priest Dow then came and stood before me, and taking from a wine-glass a small thin wafer, he placed it upon my tongue, at the same time repeating some Latin words, which, the Superior afterwards told me, mean in English, "The body and blood of Christ." [22]

This extract demonstrates ignorance of actual Catholic practice, which is suggestive of the writer's ideological bias. In this interpretation the protagonist literally cannot understand either the foreign words or the actions she performs. Again, Richardson referred to this inability to understand that which is made obscure when describing the ceremony of 'taking the white veil,' conducted in Latin. In this case, there was another barrier to understanding, in that the girls were too young to understand the import of the vows they were making: 'I there met ten other little girls, who, like myself, were compelled to take upon themselves vows they did not understand, and thus, by an apparently voluntary act, consign themselves to slavery for life.'[23] For these authors, Catholic prayers were worthless in its most literal sense. For them, Catholics were not only denied the Word of God; they were also effectively denied the consolations of prayer.

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[21] Jane Dunbar Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1853), 47.
[22] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 16.
[23] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 39.

Catholic prayer in this interpretation was not merely described as incomprehensible. Convent narratives portrayed Catholics as being unable to pray from the heart because of the barriers their faith allegedly placed between them and God. In a real sense, Catholics in the convent narratives did not know how to pray, at least as prayer would be understood by nineteenth-century American Protestants. For example, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1862 novel Agnes of Sorrento, the monk, Francesco, who is tormented by illicit love for Agnes, a virtuous girl, attempts to pray:

> The monk fell on his knees and breathed out piercing supplications. Every nerve and fibre within him seemed tense with his agony of prayer. It was not the outcry for purity and peace, not a tender longing for forgiveness, not a filial remorse for sin, but the nervous anguish of an unendurable torture. It was the cry of a man upon the rack, the despairing scream of him who feels himself sinking in a burning dwelling.[24]

Such a prayer, in Stowe's view, can bring no consolation. In contrast, Protestant prayer is depicted as simple, heartfelt and effective. In The Convent and the Manse (1853), for example, Mr. Vail, a minister, bids farewell to a friend: 'When Richard rose to go, Mr. Vail followed him to the door, saying, as he gave the parting hand, "God bless you, my dear young friend!" This blessing was still in the mind of Richard when he entered his home. The short prayer thus breathed forth from the pastor's heart had reached heaven, and was destined to bring back an answer of peace.'[25]

Protestants rejected rituals, ceremonies and creeds which they believed were not justified by the Bible, although this is not to suggest that Protestant worship could not itself be ritualistic. However, such ceremony was only tolerated, in theory anyway, when it had scriptural justification. Protestants criticized large swathes of Catholic doctrine and practice as 'unscriptural,' for example, the authority of the Pope; the role of good works in achieving salvation; the reverence given to the Virgin Mary, saints and relics;

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[24] Harriet Beecher Stowe, Agnes of Sorrento (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), 258.
[25] Chaplin, The Convent and the Manse, 186.

transubstantiation; purgatory; prayers for the dead; auricular confession; clerical celibacy; monasticism; and the use of Latin in public worship.

Excessive asceticism was one of the charges levelled at Catholic practice. Many of these texts depicted the detrimental effects of fasting and self-inflicted penance. It was argued that such practices were unnecessary and displeasing to God. Self-mortification was judged by Protestants to be physically, mentally and spiritually damaging. Josephine Bunkley described the extreme discipline of the Carmelite order: 'The Carmelite nuns are required to fast during eight months of the year...During the heat of summer they sleep between woolen blankets, and in the severities of winter they are furnished with scarcely clothing enough to keep them from the effects of the frost.'[26] The attraction of such penances is described in Priest and Nun (1869):

> It is natural to the human heart to desire to save itself, and to cherish the idea of getting into heaven by good works. Grace fell readily into this delusive hope. The earnest belief of those about her and their fanatical austerities attracted her imagination...She became blindly infatuated.[27]

Sister Agnes (1854) also showed the excesses of ascetic nuns who fasted, self-flagellated and slept in coffins. Such an obsession with punishment and death was depicted as a self-indulgent mockery of sainthood where nuns inflicted suffering on themselves for no reason, instead of living happy and useful lives. They were described as 'cadaverous women, hunger-bitten, diseased, filthy, with countenances indicative of continual pain.'[28] In this view such practises were even, in some cases, a form of blasphemy, as in the case of one nun who pierced her hands 'in blasphemous imitation of the Redeemer.'[29]

For the authors of convent narratives, Catholic forms of worship were, literally, meaningless. They suggested that this was a deliberate ploy to make Catholics more

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[26] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 41.
[27] Wright, Priest and Nun, 355.
[28] Sister Agnes, 310.
[29] Sister Agnes, 313.

malleable. For example, Isaac Kelso, in the novel Danger in the Dark (1854), wrote of two nuns 'whose faculties had at last been so manacled, and whose spirits so crushed by the incubus of papal superstition, than they were prepared to yield implicitly to whatever their spiritual guides enjoined.'[30] Josephine Bunkley described in 1855 'those brilliant and attractive rites which had been witnessed with delight and wonder in early childhood,' suggesting that Catholic ceremony was designed to appeal to the senses and imagination rather than to the brain and the soul. She stated that 'it was not from a serious and adequate perception of the sinfulness of my own heart; of the holiness and justice of God; of my danger as a guilty and sentenced transgressor, that my religious convictions proceeded, but rather from a poetic sensibility; from a weak desire of passive quiet and spiritual inaction.'[31] The rituals and ceremonies of Catholic worship were characterized in Richardson's narrative as 'senseless mummeries'; she wrote 'I know full well, that they cannot satisfy the restless yearnings of the immortal mind.'[32] Richardson argued in 1858 that Catholic ritual was worthless because the participants could not understand what was happening, and therefore could not engage in true worship of God. Protestants believed that such rituals prevented individuals from attaining a true faith in God and a true understanding of His nature. Richardson asked rhetorically,

> What will it avail to place a crown of thorns upon a child's head, or to bid her kneel before the image of the Saviour, or travel up stairs on her knees, while the way of salvation by Christ is never explained to her; while of real religion, holiness of heart, and purity of life she is as ignorant as the most benighted, degraded heathen?[33]

Bunkley's narrative alleged that priests deliberately played upon superstition in order to manipulate nuns:

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[30] Isaac Kelso, Danger in the Dark (Cincinnati: Moore Anderson, Wilstach & Keys, 1854), 81.
[31] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 17, 31-32.
[32] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 56.
[33] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 55.

> Many things occurred during my stay at St. Joseph's that seemed strange at the time, and, however easily to be explained as machinations of miracle-working Priestcraft, caused much alarm and excitement among the community where they were enacted. This will scarcely seem a matter of surprise when it is considered what an atmosphere of superstition and what a world of imaginary fears surround the poor inmates of a convent.[34]

Richardson's narrative argued that Catholic rituals opened the door to superstition: 'I was…told that if I swallowed the wafer before it had melted on my tongue, *it would choke me to death*; and if I indulged an evil thought while I held it in my mouth *I should fall into a pool of blood*.'[35] The convent narratives accused Roman Catholicism of actively encouraging superstitious beliefs, which easily took root in ignorant minds, the better to control and dominate individuals – the real objective, for them, of the papacy. For these writers, this was another of Popery's weapons against liberty.

These writers were disturbed by what they perceived as the 'unnatural' and 'unscriptural' sanctification of celibacy in Catholic doctrine. Influenced by the 'cult of true womanhood' and the ideal of 'republican motherhood' (see Chapter 3), they believed that men and women were intended to marry and have children, and that taking a perpetual vow of chastity encouraged vice. No Christian would suggest that poverty, chastity and obedience were vices in themselves, but these authors argued that it was unnatural for nuns to swear lifelong vows to uphold these virtues. The British author H. Townsend Powell argued this case in his pamphlet Nuns and Nunneries (London, 1853):

> When a nun takes the veil, and makes the vows which are then proposed to her, she promises to do that which is impossible for her to perform without God's help; doubtless she presumes upon having that help; but she presumes *unwarrantably* upon having God's help when she seeks it to enable her to perform that which God does not require of her.[36]

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[34] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 112.
[35] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 16.
[36] H. Townsend Powell, Nuns and Nunneries: A Letter to the Parishioners of Stretton-on-Dunsmore (London: Painter, 1853), 10.

The narrator of Sister Agnes (1854) exclaims 'Poor girl! God could have created thee an angel, if that had been wisest and best for thee. He made thee a woman, a daughter; thou impeachest His wisdom, His benevolence.'[37] Bunkley's narrative claimed in 1855 that, in the Catholic religion, 'to be truly *religious* signifies, in her distorted language, not to illustrate the principles of the Gospel in all those humble but sanctified employments that belong to the lot where God has placed us, but to fly from the scene of trial, and abandon the relations of our providential position, and to waste, in a condition of passivity and mental vacuity, the precious moments of probation.'[38] Celibacy was closely linked by these authors to the unwarrantable abdication of responsibility – it was a cornerstone of monasticism, and a cornerstone of Protestant objections to monasteries and convents.

These authors were critical of the ceremony of the nun's 'espousal to Christ,' arguing that it was blasphemous. For example, in Sister Agnes (1854) the novel's author describes 'the day of – as they blasphemously termed it – her espousals to Christ...[Sister Agnes] was robed, as if in mockery, in bridal attire.'[39] In The Arch Bishop (1855) such ideas are closely linked to the sexual violation of a nun by a priest, who tells her ' "You are the bride of Heaven now – my bride! – think you we allow a boorish heretic to possess our most charming maidens – mine in life – Heaven's in death! – you ought to envy the future that awaits you." '[40] Convents were attacked on the grounds that they perverted the natural, and heaven-ordained, order of life.

These texts also criticized convents for supposedly promoting a view of monastic life as a spiritual refuge from temporal cares. Such claims were attacked on the grounds both that they offered a false picture, and also for representing a withdrawal

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[37] Sister Agnes, 93.
[38] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 33-34.
[39] Sister Agnes, 208, 210.
[40] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 73.

from participation in society, where, Protestants argued, individuals had a duty to work for the glory of God and the common good. In The Beautiful Nun (1866), a governess, who is actually a Catholic spy, describes to her Protestant charge the attractions of convent life:

> Sometimes, when I am weary of this cold, heartless world, I feel as if I should like to seek the calm, pleasant rest of a convent, where, listening to sweet music, and calm in my devotion, I might glide pleasantly through life, and at last pass into the upper and better world, untarnished by the dross of this![41]

In Danger in the Dark (1854), one nun tells another that 'The father-confessor told me...I would find it such a charming and happy life to be a nun! but by no means have I realized my anticipations.'[42] Josephine Bunkley also described the encouragement she received; 'often did I hear described in glowing words the condition of holy men and women who had turned all their thoughts away from earth, consecrated all their powers to God, and spent their lives in ceaseless contemplation and adoring love. I aspired to this perfection.'[43] Protestants believed that it was wrong to 'glide pleasantly through life,' and wrong for Catholicism to encourage this aspiration.

Anti-convent authors additionally argued that Catholic practice and ritual worsened the problems caused by monastic celibacy, particularly the practice of auricular confession, whereby every Catholic was obliged to recount his or her sins to a confessor and receive absolution from him. Anti-convent writers were very critical of the practice. Most convent narratives contained a section on the evils and temptations of the confessional. Anti-Catholic writers believed it was invented by priests and lacking Biblical sanction, and used by the Roman Catholic church to gain power over the souls of its adherents. They were particularly concerned about the effect of confession on

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[41] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 137.
[42] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 15.
[43] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 34.

young women. It was believed that priests subjected them to improper questions in an effort to get them to recount every sin of thought, word, and deed, and that such questioning amounted to an instruction in sin:

> A young man, perhaps in the flower of age, gifted with warm affections, and fitted for that holy state of matrimony from which an unnatural and a debasing policy debars him – the priest is bound [i.e. required] to be acquainted...with a tissue of obscenity and filthiness, and to question his penitent – perhaps a young nun - ...to ask her whether she has committed crimes from which nature recoils, and of the existence of which she ought to be ignorant.

Thus wrote Lewis Tonna (Nuns and Nunneries, London, 1852). He elaborated on the particular dangers confession presented to nuns: 'A darker hue yet is thrown over it when we imagine the penitent herself, to be wriggling under the irritation of a similar vow of celibacy, for which by nature she was utterly unfitted, and which has been wrung from her by importunate cruelty, or filched from her by craft and deceit.'[44] In Sister Agnes (1854), confession is described as 'a secret engine of power over families, by which the priest pries into all of their secrets, and wields complete authority over them.'[45] The anonymous author wrote that, for Protestants, 'No questioning is needed to bring before Him the true state of the penitent...what exists is laid bare and deplored; but what does not exist is not called into being...God gave the precious blood of his own Son to atone for the guilt.'[46] The American narratives of the 1850s and 1860s were equally dismayed by the practice. Confession was not merely seen as a device for encouraging immorality; it was viewed as part of a sinister mechanism of surveillance over the individual. Bunkley wrote that 'by this channel [the priest] becomes familiar with the thoughts and feelings…of all with whom these individual penitents may come in contact;

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[44] Lewis Tonna, Nuns and Nunneries: Sketches Compiled Entirely from Romish Sources (London: Seeley's, 1852), 57, 61.
[45] Sister Agnes, 66.
[46] Sister Agnes, 199.

and thus the wide circles of society are opened to his intrigues and contrivances.'[47] She stated that '[Priests'] power over the rite of confession affords them great facilities to accomplish their purposes…Kneeling there, the young maiden answers questions calculated to eradicate every feeling of modesty.'[48] Confession is painted as unscriptural, as tending to immorality, as an unwarrantable invasion of the privacy that should exist between a Christian and God, and as a tool for increasing priestly power.

One of the greatest dangers of Catholicism for these writers was that its perceived insistence on meaningless ritual and ceremony, rather than reasoned spiritual enquiry, might encourage disenchanted followers – unable to gain access to the Bible, the ultimate bastion of faith – to reject religion entirely and become atheists. The atheistic tendencies of some Enlightenment writing already posed a threat, and Catholicism was seen as another force which fostered disbelief. In Sister Agnes (1854) the villainous Jesuit, Padre Carlo, has rejected Christianity, having witnessed the enormities of Catholicism; 'He emerged an infidel. Religion to him was a fable; faith a mockery.'[49] In Sarah Richardson's narrative (1858), a nun, about to be executed, (in a convent, and, implausibly, on the orders of a bishop) tells him

> I do not fear death nor anything that comes after it. Talk about the existence of a God! I don't believe a word of it. And the story of heaven and hell, purgatory, and the Virgin Mary; why, it's all a humbug, like the rest of the vile stuff you call religion. Religion indeed! You won't catch us nuns believing it, and more than all that, you don't believe it yourselves, not one of you.[50]

In Priest and Nun (1869), Adelaide, a young girl who has received a Catholic education, is portrayed as 'growing every day more bold and scoffing…[she] had her doubts

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[47] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 26.
[48] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 140.
[49] Sister Agnes, 30.
[50] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 154-155.

altogether about souls and eternity.'[51] For these writers Catholicism was a gateway to infidelity.

Protestant belief taught that clergymen should not set themselves above their flocks, and that a priest or minister, though he might have more learning, wisdom or piety than his congregation, could not be endowed with any special grace or favour, and was not any better qualified to read or interpret the scriptures by virtue of his ordination alone. This was in contrast to the Catholic system, which was hierarchical and in which the priest was regarded as a mediator between God and laymen while the Pope was regarded as infallible.

Protestants criticized the Catholic religion for vesting too much spiritual power in the person of the priest and for attributing to priests the power to absolve sin, which they believed to lie with God alone. Anti-Catholic writers accused priests of misusing this power. In Six Hours in a Convent (1855), a priest incites a Catholic mob to murder the hero by offering absolution as a reward: 'Kill him, if he resists – remember, he is a heretic, I'll give you absolution for all you do.'[52] Three years later, Richardson wrote of a dying nun who refuses to confess and be absolved:

> "Daughter," exclaimed the priest, with affected sympathy, "must I give you up? How can I see you go down to perdition? It is not yet too late. Confess your sins and repent."
> "I have already confessed my sins to God, and I shall confess to no one else. He alone can save me." Her manner of saying this was solemn but very decided. The priest saw that she would not yield to his wishes, and raising his voice, he exclaimed, "Then let the devil take you."[53]

It was believed that priests wielded too much power over the consciences of their flock. George Bourne, in his convent narrative Lorette (1833), argued that priestly power was taken to wicked and unscriptural lengths:

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[51] Wright, Priest and Nun, 189.
[52] Charles Frothingham, Six Hours in a Convent; or, The Stolen Nuns!, Boston: Graves & Weston, 1854, 28.
[53] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal, 85.

> Catholics are made to believe that everything is true which [the priest] says, and that every thing is proper which he desires. This dreadfully wicked doctrine is sanctioned by the assurance, that he can pardon every sin; and that without his good will, no person will go to heaven.[54]

Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures (1836) claimed that one nun in the Hôtel Dieu nunnery 'was partly persuaded by the priest to believe that he could not sin, because he was a priest, and that anything he did to her would sanctify her.'[55] In Paul and Julia (1855) the hero, Paul, is told by a priest 'What happiness does the world offer? Freedom? – but freedom is a dream. God has constituted kings and emperors rulers of the people, and the clergy rulers of all.'[56] The Roman hierarchy, it was argued, was a vehicle for the imposition of despotic power by the Pope over his subjects throughout the world: 'The Pope utters his wish to his Bishops, the Bishops bear it to their Priests, the Priests direct the members of the church, and they all obey, because the Pope has a right to rule them, *they are his subjects*.'[57]

While priests were the main targets, nuns in authority were also suspected of assuming too much spiritual power. Rebecca Reed's narrative claimed in 1835 that confession was made by nuns to the Superior of the convent: 'The manner of confession to the Superior is as follows: the room is first darkened, and one lighted wax taper placed upon the Superior's throne; and she is considered as filling the place or station of the Blessed Virgin.'[58] Such a description evoked the sins of idolatry and blasphemy. Maria Monk alleged in 1836 that the nuns harboured further superstitions regarding the Superior, who encouraged them:

> It is wonderful that we could have carried our reverence for the Superior so far as we did, although it was the direct tendency of many instructions

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[54] Bourne, Lorette, 25.
[55] Monk, Awful Disclosures, 6.
[56] Pitrat, Paul and Julia, 83.
[57] Hartford American Dispatch, July 14, 1855, in Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 104.
[58] Reed, Six Months in a Convent, 81.

> and regulations, indeed of the whole system, to permit, even to foster, a superstitious regard for her. One of us was occasionally called into her room to cut her nails, or dress her hair; and we would often collect the clippings, and distribute them to each other...I once picked up all her stray hairs...and kept them for some time, until she told me I was not worthy to possess things so sacred.[59]

Anti-Catholic writers argued that a system that set some men and women above others and gave them undue power over the mind and body of others, could be, and was, easily abused.

These beliefs persisted and remained popular among anti-Catholic writers in the 1850s and 1860s who wished to discredit the Catholic church in a way that appealed to the popular imagination and the public's taste for sensation. For example, in the anonymous novel The Mysterious Marriage (circa 1853), a priest seduces a nun by telling her 'Ah, Dora, who of the Heretics would not give his life to be thus loved – to have you to love, and a holy love it is too, for it is within walls sacred to the cross.' He persuades her that 'marriage need never be necessary for the union of such hearts as ours.'[60]

The convent narratives argued that Catholicism placed unwarranted stress on obedience to the clergy. Isaac Kelso's novel Danger in the Dark (1854) claimed that Catholics were controlled by priests who induced fear of damnation in order to manipulate them:

> The clergy sternly deny any compulsion being used in such cases – yet wherein does it differ from compulsion? The deluded victims are pointed to a burning hell, and told that *implicit obedience* to the commands of the priesthood alone, can save the soul from its quenchless and torturing flames. Had Dupin employed physical force in dragging Maria to the convent…it would have been an outrage of no greater magnitude, than what he has committed, in terrifying her, by threats of perdition, into a compliance with his nefarious wishes.[61]

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[59] Monk, Awful Disclosures, 14.
[60] Eliza Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage: A True Romance of New York Life (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, n.d. [c.1853]), 52.
[61] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 61.

Catholic priests were accused of imposing an iron discipline on their parishioners and effectively breaking their wills. In Danger in the Dark (1854) the Jesuit, Dupin, explains his own machine-like obedience to his superiors: 'As a Jesuit, I am not my own – but stand, obsequious to the will of his holiness, the pope – promptly rendering obedience, in thought, word and deed.'[62] Sister Agnes (1854) depicted nuns as 'so many machines, all their motions were controlled…A nun must have no will; she acts but by the will of her superiors.'[63] Bunkley claimed in 1855 that, for a nun, 'the chief requirement was an abject submission to the will and the commands of the superiors *in every respect;* that their dictates must be regarded with the same reverence as the will of God himself.' She states, regarding relationships between priests and nuns, that '*The vow of* OBEDIENCE *here has supremacy over the vow of chastity.*' The point was italicized in the text so that its significance would not be missed by the reader.[64]

These texts also attacked Catholic clerics for allegedly believing and teaching that 'the end sanctified the means' where the good of the church was concerned. In Sister Agnes (1854) the priest, Father Hooran, speaking to the convent's superior, justifies preventing a school pupil from seeing her friends even though a promise to this effect has been made:

> As a good daughter of the church, you doubtless attached to you promise the condition (mentally) that the thing promised should turn out beneficial to us...If it be for her good, and the good of the church, she shall have liberty to visit her friends. Now, should it be proved, that to visit her friends be neither for her good nor the good of the church, then the promise annexed to the condition ought not to be fulfilled. The condition is principal – the promise is but accessory.'[65]

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[62] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 71.
[63] Sister Agnes, 185.
[64] Bunkley, Miss Bunkley's Book, 98, 134.
[65] Sister Agnes, 169.

He claims he will compel the pupil – an heiress – to become a nun, because 'when it is for the good of her soul and of the church, it would be false charity to defer to her wishes.'[66]

In The Arch Bishop (1855), a priest states that 'no faith need be kept with heretics, unless the policy demands it...the end justifies the means; and, in such cases, it is both allowable and honorable to practice them.'[67] This attitude, argued anti-Catholics, suggested that no Catholic could be trusted in anything. In The Beautiful Nun (1866), a priest says that 'deception, when used for benefit of our Holy Church and for the advancement of our sacred order is no sin – it is rather a virtue which in due season will be fittingly rewarded.'[68] The belief that Catholics espoused such a doctrine explains the repeated insistence in the convent narratives that priests are scheming and deceitful. In these texts, cruel and tyrannous actions are carried out, and justified, in the name of the good of the church.

The authors of the convent narratives revealed in their writings the tremendous extent to which Protestant theological assumptions had been assimilated into their thoughts, and the extent to which they had absorbed a consciousness of the doctrinal divisions between Protestant and Catholic. The previous chapter demonstrated that the convent narratives were concerned for the safety of the state; here it has been shown that these concerns had a theological dimension. The next section will discuss in more detail the relationships between Protestantism, Catholicism and the American republic.

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[66] Sister Agnes, 170.
[67] Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 282.
[68] Ned Buntline, The Beautiful Nun (Philadelphia, T.B. Peterson & Brothers, 1866), 44.

The 'Catholic menace'

American Protestants were fascinated and repelled by the perceived Catholic resurgence in Europe. Even more alarming was the growth of the Catholic church in the United States. The first Provincial Council of Baltimore was held in 1829. This was a council of American bishops which agreed on a number of decrees including those ordering the use of the Douay Bible, the establishment of Catholic schools and the creation of a Catholic Tract Society in the United States. According to Sydney Ahlstrom, this 'revealed to non-Catholic Americans in no uncertain terms that the Roman Catholic church was a substantial, growing, and well-organized reality.'[69] By 1830 there were 33 monasteries and convents in the United States.[70] This was not simply a matter of immigration. Protestant 'native-born' Americans were converting to Catholicism. Ahlstrom suggests that the number of converts to Catholicism in the United States between 1813 and 1893 may have been as many as 700,000.[71] By 1850, the Roman Catholic church was the biggest single denomination in the United States.[72] The evidence of the texts suggests that anti-convent authors were more anxious about the new Catholic communities than about those that had existed in the colonial period in Maryland. They dwelled on institutions in the north and on the conversion of Protestants suggesting that may have they feared these elements more than longer-established convents in those southern states which had a Catholic heritage.

Constitutionally, Americans were guaranteed religious freedom. These texts argued that Catholics were liable to exploit this freedom to further their conspiratorial aims. In Danger in the Dark (1854) the naive mother Mrs. May tells her sceptical friend

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[69] Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, 540.
[70] Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 37.
[71] Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, 548.
[72] Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, 555.

that 'I'm no Catholic, but just think their religion's as good as any; and it's mighty unfair that they should be so cruelly treated as [the priest] Mr. Dupin says they are.'[73] These authors warned their readers against embracing toleration of Catholicism too wholeheartedly, as in Sister Agnes (1854), which describes a nun who specializes in posing as a servant, using the position to convert family members to Catholicism: 'some persons would have called it *intolerance* to interfere with the *free* exercise of her religion. We are showing in what its 'free exercise' consisted.' In this novel, one character, Colonel Hayward, goes as far as to exclaim 'A guerdon [reward] for old red-faced Oliver [Cromwell]!...He would have blown the convent to atoms...the pusillanimity of these days robs one of his entire stock of patience.'[74]

It was widely believed that the Pope and his ecclesiastical machine sought to overthrow American democracy and rule the United States from Rome. For example, the Texas State Times wrote in 1855 that

> It is a notorious fact that the Monarchs of Europe and the Pope of Rome are at this very moment plotting our destruction and threatening the extinction of our political, civil, and religious institutions. We have the best reasons for believing that our Executive head is tainted with the infectious venom of Catholicism.[75]

(President Pierce had provoked anger by appointing a Catholic, James Campbell, to the position of Postmaster-General.) Speculation like this, presented with such conviction, played its part in spreading fear of Catholicism and the power of the Catholic church. The visit of the papal nuncio, Gaetano Bedini, in 1853, added fuel to such suspicions. The anti-Catholic press painted Bedini as a ruthless reactionary and publicized his involvement in the suppression of the Italian revolutionary uprising in 1849 and the execution of the republican priest Ugo Bassi. The former priest and Protestant convert

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[73] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 36.
[74] Sister Agnes, 45, 371.
[75] Texas State Times, September 15, 1855, in David Brion Davis (ed.), The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 5.

Giacinto Achilli, who had been chaplain to Garibaldi's army, now lived in the United States and regularly gave lectures on the iniquity of Rome, and Bedini in particular. Kelso attacked Bedini in Danger in the Dark (1854):

> We will proceed to notice…his basely proving traitor to the Republic of which he was a subject in 1849, and becoming the spy of the Pope in the city of Bologna. This crime in Bedini, though worthy of death, was nothing compared with the brutality, and infernal malignity he displayed in the assassination and torture of Ugo Bassi, a man of uncommon talent and virtue.[76]

Belisle also attacked Bedini in the following year: 'He came with his hands still reeking with the blood of Italy's patriots, and dripping with their warm life currents, raised them in pious horror, because their American brothers saw not his dignity and pomp – nothing but his ensanguined hands – at which patriots had sought, but without finding mercy.'[77] Bedini's visit was ill-managed from a public relations point of view; the lengthy duration of his stay, which was extended, even after he had been burned in effigy by angry crowds (Kelso wrote 'he was burnt in effigy – but always in a quiet and peaceable way'![78]) encouraged anti-Catholics to believe that he was planning the overthrow of American democracy.[79]

In addition to the Bedini controversy, American Catholics were quoted making inflammatory remarks like that attributed to Orestes Brownson, that 'Protestantism is effete, powerless, [and] dying out.'[80] Archbishop of John Hughes of New York was regularly reported as having made comments which, for anti-Catholics, illustrated his disregard for American values. His words in 1850 had confirmed the fears of those who believed Catholicism had designs on the United States:

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[76] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 216-217.
[77] Belisle, The Arch-Bishop, 349.
[78] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 261.
[79] See Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery, 27-29.
[80] Quoted in Know Nothing Almanac (1856), 60, in Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery, 112.

> Protestantism pretends to have discovered a great secret. Protestantism startles our eastern borders occasionally on the intention of the Pope with regard to the Valley of the Mississippi, and dreams that it has made a wonderful discovery. Not at all. Everybody should know it. Everybody should know that we have for our mission to convert the world – including the inhabitants of the United States, - the people of the cities, and the people of the country, the officers of the navy and the marines, commanders of the army, the Legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, the President, and all![81]

Anti-Catholic activists regarded such avowals as evidence, not merely of the aim of the Catholic church to make converts, but – because of the link for Americans between the political and the religious – as proof of an actual plot to overthrow the American (and Protestant) republic and institute Catholic despotism in its place. In Danger in the Dark (1854), the convent's abbess tells two young nuns that 'All good Catholics pray that the time may speedily come when the Church will have power to establish the holy Inquisition in America.'[82]

Catholicism and republicanism were viewed as mutually incompatible, because, for anti-Catholics, Romanism was predicated on power and dominion by the few over the many. The convent narratives stressed the dichotomy between the two theological systems. Thomas Ford Caldicott, in Hannah Corcoran (1853), wrote that 'liberty of conscience and the Roman Catholic religion cannot exist together.'[83] Additionally, Andrew Cross claimed in Priests' Prisons for Women (1854) that

> It is the case that a young white woman, a native born citizen of Baltimore, who has been enticed into a convent, after one year becomes the *bona fide* property of the convent, or the priests, or the Church, and loses all her right to personal liberty, which is the fact under this convent system.[84]

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[81] John Hughes, speech delivered November 1850 and reprinted as The Decline of Protestantism and its Causes, in Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 291.
[82] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 21.
[83] Thomas Caldicott, Hannah Corcoran: An Authentic Narrative of Her Conversion from Romanism, Her Abduction from Charlestown, and the Treatment She Received During Her Absence (Boston: Gould, 1853), 22.
[84] Andrew Cross, Priests' Prisons for Women (Baltimore: Sherwood & Co., 1854), 5.

Pitrat's novel Paul and Julia argued in 1855 that 'a Christian…abhors tyranny, disdains despots, and holds life dear only when he enjoys liberty.'[85] By contrast, the monk Paul's superior tells him that 'Autocracy being our banner, we hate all other forms of government. We hate, with all the fibres of our heart, a republican government, because it exists both from the people and for the people. We hate a constitutional government, because it smells of democracy.'[86] David Brion Davis has linked American Protestantism to the 'paranoid style' in the political sphere: he argues that 'Protestant writers exhibited all the traits of the paranoid style, picturing the Catholic church as the very archetype of the 'Monster Institution' contrived to subvert liberty in every part of the world.'[87] The study of the convent narratives substantiates this analysis.

The previous section enumerated the theological basis for the anti-convent campaign. This section has argued that the profound insecurity felt by these authors, regarding the safety of the American republic, was deepened by threats they perceived as directed against the United States and the American way of life by the Catholic church. The next section will address the view of Protestantism in America taken by the convent narratives, and will examine the relationship of reformed religion to the republican basis of the state.

Protestant insecurity

Under the first amendment to the Constitution, Americans were entitled to freedom of conscience in religious matters, but this did not mean that all faiths were treated equally. The influence of Protestantism was believed by many to regulate not

[85] Pitrat, Paul and Julia, 248.
[86] Pitrat, Paul and Julia, 285.
[87] Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, 67.

only the spirituality of American life, but also the safety of the nation state. For example, B.P. Aydelott had written in 1843 that 'either we must be kept in order by the iron hand of despotism, or at least restrained by such a police power as will greatly impair our liberty, or, we must have a larger infusion of Bible Christianity.'[88] Protestantism, republicans believed, would uphold the freedoms offered by the American constitution, in conjunction with other institutions. D.F. Robertson wrote in 1851, in a work significantly titled National Destiny and Our Country, that 'no community can long exist without *Religion and State.* And the freedom and happiness of any people has been, is, and will be, in proportion to the essential purity of their religion – the open Bible being the standard of that purity.'[89] Rush Welter argues that Americans 'looked to free religion, free schools, and free land to guarantee the privileges they had been born to.'[90] For example, the Albany State Register stated that 'The freedom we enjoy, the liberty of conscience, the freedom of religious faith and worship, the sanctity of civil, religious, social, and personal rights, are but the normal results of the enlightened liberalism of the Protestant faith.'[91] Orvilla Belisle, in her novel The Arch-Bishop (1855), called the Bible a 'corner-stone of the Republic.'[92] Such views continued to be expressed in the 1860s – Ned Buntline wrote in 1866 that 'where the Bible is a school-book, while it is read in our families, and studied by our legislators, our liberties are safe. When it is discarded, this republic will tremble at its very base.'[93]

Protestants faced growing religious diversity in the United States. The Catholic church, seen by Protestants as in every way antithetical to true religion, was gaining ground in the United States. The orthodox Protestants, the Presbyterians and the

[88] B.P. Aydelott, Our Country's Evils and Their Remedy (1843), 37-38, in Rush Welter, The Mind of America 1820-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 262.
[89] D.F. Robertson, National Destiny and Our Country. A Discourse (New York: E. French, 1851), 24.
[90] Welter, The Mind of America, 253.
[91] Albany State Register, September 20, 1855, in Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery, 104.
[92] Belisle, The Arch-Bishop, 212.
[93] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun, 51.

Congregationalists, who had hitherto dominated American religion, particularly in the north where the Anglican church was weak, were also dismayed by the progress made by newer denominations.

The years following the Revolution witnessed, in some circles, an increased liberalism in religion and a surge of interest in deism. During the 1820s reaction against this tendency set in, chiefly displayed in revivalist evangelical fervour (see 105-106, 207); Ray Allen Billington argues that 'the whole country was under the influence of a wave of religious excitement; Protestantism suddenly became a thing to be venerated and protected, while Catholicism, as an antagonistic system, was proportionately resented.'[94] However, for some of the anti-convent writers, revivalism was not an unmixed blessing. Anti-Catholic writers sometimes suggested that divisions among Protestants were aiding Catholic 'conspiracies'; for example, in Lily White (1858) the author states that 'while Protestants are waging war upon each other on some trivial tenet of faith, the Roman Church remains a unit in sentiment, and stands forth as a great and gigantic power.'[95]

In the colonial period, ministers, especially in the north east, had wielded tremendous political and social power. In this period, life for the vast majority of Americans was focused around local events and a localized sense of identity, starting at parish level, where the local minister was naturally a pre-eminent source of information and guidance. By 1850, however, newspapers, popular literature, federal elections, and embryonic industrialization were combining with a host of other forces to broaden the social and political horizons of Americans. The minister competed with many other sources of authority and guidance and inevitably lost some of his traditional influence and standing.

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[94] Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 42.
[95] Edward Goodwin, Lily White: A Romance (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1858), 199.

This was a time of flux within Protestantism in the United States. Previously stable congregations were changing their balance and structure. The number of ministers increased rapidly during the early years of the republic, increasing pressure further.[96] The number of denominations had increased, giving Protestant Americans more choice in where they worshipped. This meant that clergymen were obliged to make efforts to attract them. The result, argues Nathan O. Hatch, was a trend towards the popularization of religion:

> Religious populism, reflecting the passions of ordinary people and the charisma of democratic movement-builders, remains among the oldest and deepest impulses in American life...With the rise of fierce religious competition, movements that employed more aggressive measures prospered. Churches reluctant to compete on the same terms declined.[97]

It seems likely that, given these circumstances, the zealous promotion of anti-Catholicism had some relation to clerical insecurity. Joseph Mannard argues that 'Disestablishment of their state churches led some Congregationalist ministers to try to regain their authority by leading the fight against Catholic infiltration.' [98] For example, the minister Rufus Clark wrote in 1849 that 'while the Papists are united, and all bent upon the extension of their religion, those whom we denominate Protestants are divided; many of them being infidels, and a still larger number being indifferent to all religion.'[99] Congregationalist and Presbyterian ministers experienced the loss of parishioners to newer denominations and to Romanism. In addition, in the growing urban centres it was much easier for individuals to simply stop attending church once removed from the social pressures in smaller communities. The decreasing congregations reduced ministers' influence and also, more practically, their income. The Unitarian movement,

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[96] Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity, 4.
[97] Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity, 5, 15.
[98] Joseph G. Mannard, 'American Anti-Catholicism and its Literature,' Ex Libris 4:1 (1981), 3.
[99] Rufus Clark, Popery and the United States, Embracing an Account of Papal Operations in our Country (Boston: J.V. Bean & Co., 1847), 19.

though far from populist, was another serious threat to the hegemony of traditional churches in New England, and indeed became the principal religion in the Boston area. Many of the pupils at the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, which was burned by a mob in 1834, had been sent there by Unitarian parents, which only intensified the suspicion of both religions felt by traditional denominations.

Another factor in the changing status of ministers, it has been argued, was the 'feminization' of religion.[100] According to Ann Douglas, during the first half of the nineteenth century, religion moved to the female 'sphere' of activity. Church members were more likely to be women; congregations were made up primarily of women; and many men came to see the practice of religion as a female preserve. This is not to suggest that men renounced or dismissed religion. However, in the view of Douglas, as economic change altered employment patterns, men came to view religion as something practiced by the women of a family, as if on behalf of its male members who were preoccupied with economic activities. This is not to say that all men necessarily lost interest in religion, which is demonstrably untrue, but that religion may have become increasingly associated with the feminine dimension as 'domesticized' women, who were increasingly invested with special skills in the moral and emotional spheres by prevalent ideals of womanhood, assumed responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of the family. This shift had an impact on clerical self-perception. As churches multiplied, membership ebbed and flowed, and religion became identified as feminine, many ministers of the older, more established denominations felt that they had lost status, notwithstanding the rhetoric of those who linked the welfare of the state with the promotion of religion. Anbinder argues that 'the participation of Protestant leaders in

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[100] Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (London, Papermac, 1996 [1977]); See also Richard D. Shiels, 'The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835', American Quarterly 33:1 (Spring 1981), 46-62.

the [Know-Nothing] Order…reflected an attempt by American ministers to increase their political influence.'[101] Many of the convent narratives, and other nativist texts, were, as discussed above in Chapter 2, either written or edited by clergymen (the difference between writing and editing was often shadowy in these texts.) It may seem strange that these stories do not feature strong Protestant clerical influences. In these texts, prospective nuns, for varying reasons, were left to fend for themselves spiritually, which was largely responsible for their difficulties. This absence, however, underlined the importance of strong clerical influence, particularly for women, and may bear out Douglas' and Anbinder's theories.

Hatch argues that the newer denominations felt they offered a more democratic alternative to the more rigid Presbyterians and Congregationalists: 'To the rebellious leaders of populist religious movements, inspired by the rhetoric of the Revolution, nothing represented ecclesiastical tyranny more that the Calvinist clergy with their zeal for theological systems, doctrinal correctness, organizational control, and cultural influence.'[102] Under attack for qualities which were popularly attributed to Catholicism, it would be unsurprising if ministers turned on Romanism, hoping to deflect criticism from themselves. Jenny Franchot suggests that 'for many antebellum Protestants, the supposed Catholic conspiracy to capture them proved not only that their faith was still vital but that their ministers were too.'[103]

Historians have argued that, in addition to pressure on ministers of the traditional denominations, caused by the growth in new sects, there was at this time a general fear of religious declension, which the clergy were determined to combat. Perry Miller wrote that 'The religious leaders of the new United States were almost

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[101] Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery, 49.
[102] Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity, 170.
[103] Jenny Franchot, Roads to Rome (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 109.

immediately convinced that the political achievement of federal union had been accompanied by a spiritual deterioration hardly to be equaled in the darkest chapters of Christian history.'[104] There was perhaps a sense, in some minds, that after the chaos of the Revolutionary war, and the political upheaval surrounding the establishment of nationhood, that, in the words of Barbara Welter, 'religion...was not very important.'[105] These fears of religious decline may have played a part in the continuous forty-year cycle of revivals that marked the first half of the nineteenth century. The religious regarded secularism and atheism with horror. In the anti-Mormon novel Mormon Wives by Metta Victor (1856), atheism leads to religious error, in this case Mormonism.[106] Similarly, Wright's novel Priest and Nun (1869) effectively blames the atheism of Mr. Wynford for the troubles of his children: 'Had Mr. Wynford been an earnest and intelligent Protestant, instead of a cold-hearted unbeliever, his children would not thus have been deliberately thrown among snares.'[107] These works and others appear to have been concerned with atheism as a potential spiritual competitor with Protestant Christianity.

This section has argued that American anti-convent writers felt a strong sense of insecurity with regard to the future progress of Protestantism in the United States. This is discernible whether the works were published in the north east, in New York and Philadelphia, or in Maryland, suggesting that these fears had a wide geographic basis. A significant number of these authors were ministers and they, too, had reason to feel uncertain about their own personal place in society. Writers evoked a range of religious

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[104] Perry Miller, The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), 3.
[105] Barbara Welter, 'The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860' in Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (eds.), Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 138.
[106] Metta Victoria Fuller Victor, Mormon Wives: A Narrative of Facts Stranger that Fiction (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), 38, 71.
[107] Wright, Priest and Nun, 283-284.

fears to link convents to a Catholic conspiracy to undermine American values – typified by the interlocking principles of American republicanism and American Protestantism.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of religion to the American convent narrative genre. This may seem self-evident, given that these documents are, by definition, concerned with religious institutions and practices. It is easy, however, to take religious prejudice for granted, and the aim of this discussion has been to examine the texts themselves in order to determine what they said about religious matters and how.

Whether or not convent narratives were written from a perspective of sincere religious belief, they all display familiarity with the key points of Protestant doctrine. The authors of convent narratives used these in order to convince their readers of the error of the monastic system and the danger it presented to the American republic, which presupposes that these authors believed that their intended audience would find such arguments convincing. The convent narratives constitute powerful evidence that Protestant theology and doctrine was deeply entrenched in American society. This is, of course, no revelation. However, it is a reminder of the power of religion in this period and an indication that it was an extremely important element in the origins of the convent narrative – not simply in terms of hostility to the Catholic religion but also in the existence of a strong and homogenous Protestant religious tradition which, these authors believed, was integral to the continuance of the American republic.

Chapter 7: The convent narrative in the context of social reform

From the early decades of the nineteenth century, the United States witnessed an enormous proliferation of efforts by individuals, outside civil or religious institutions, to 'cleanse', 'reform', 'defend' or otherwise improve or preserve the well-being of the nation and its inhabitants. Activists embarked on crusading campaigns against Freemasonry, intemperance, slavery, Mormonism and various other phenomena. In many cases the people involved were active in more than one cause. Even when this was not the case, the objectives of the reformers were closely connected.

The creators of convent narratives were involved in this conjunction of different campaigns. Anti-Catholic agitators did not view their movement as inspired by xenophobia and prejudice, but rather saw themselves as progressives, working to preserve and protect the republican liberties enshrined in the constitution of the United States from the dreaded power of Roman Catholicism. They viewed themselves as reformers, so, in the interest of authenticity, the term 'reformer' will be used to identify nativist activists as well as participants in the various other campaigns.

This chapter will analyze the connections between the anti-convent campaign and the reforming impulse which was so very marked in this period, and will trace the reform phenomenon to its root; the concern of the American people for the safety of their republic. It will be argued that these publications reveal a range of attitudes towards the evolving American republic which were shared by reformers in different movements. These texts suggest ambiguities; fear of change and the urge to cleanse the nation are revealed side by side. This chapter argues that the convent narratives were part of a reforming tradition which was concerned, above all, with the safety and welfare of the American republican experiment.

Different people participated in reforming campaigns in different ways. The reformers were a group of individuals who used individual means to effect the changes they desired. Some of the most common methods of participation included the circulation of petitions to legislatures, attending and speaking at public meetings and contributing to newspapers and periodicals. Reforming writers also used sermons, novels, plays, poems and autobiographical narratives to spread their message to a wide audience. These will be analyzed in comparison with the convent narratives to establish what these genres had in common and how they differed.

The Second Great Awakening stressed individuals' agency and encouraged followers to work actively to convert their heathen brothers and sisters. These developments encouraged the reforming impulse. Ronald G. Walters argues for the significance of this improving tendency:

> By 1814 – the year the War of 1812 ended – a combination of theological and economic developments led many women and men to assume that the world did not have to be the way it was and that individual efforts mattered…The religious revivalism of the 1820s encouraged this optimistic and activist spirit by teaching that good deeds were the mark of godliness and that the millennium was near.'[108]

Paul Boyer believes 'one could hardly overstate how thoroughly these reformers were steeped in the moral earnestness of evangelical Christianity.'[109] S.J. Kleinberg suggests that the revivals 'gave meaning [to women's lives] and brought them together with like-minded contemporaries', encouraging the formation of reforming groups.[110]

The first manifestations of nineteenth century reformism were the numerous missionary and Bible societies which were founded amid revivalist enthusiasm. The success of these campaigning movements encouraged their participants to work for the

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[108] Ronald G. Walters, American Reformers 1815-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3.
[109] Paul Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 54.
[110] S.J. Kleinberg, Women in the United States, 1830-1945 (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 22.

improvement of their fellows in other directions using the same apparatus. Anti-slavery and temperance societies emerged from this tendency, as well as movements for improved prisons and moral reform (the euphemistic name used by the anti-prostitution movement.) As these groups proliferated, and as the causes they pursued grew more diverse, campaigners began to look beyond simply influencing individuals to change their behaviour, and began to call for action in local and national politics.

It seems likely that the development of the reforming movements signified a transition in the public perception of virtue. For theorists of republicanism, virtue connoted attributes which contributed to the welfare of society – values like bravery, integrity and honesty. In the reforming tradition, however, participants aimed to improve the moral and spiritual well-being of individuals, as individuals, because they believed that in so doing they were carrying out God's work. They aimed to encourage values such as piety and temperance. They believed that the adoption of these values would improve society, but this was, in the main, a secondary consideration.

It is tempting to view this as a chronological shift, from the early, post-Revolution republic to the antebellum era. However, most American republicans were also practising Christians, who had a Christian conception of personal morality and responsibility. It would therefore be overstating the case to suggest that there was a straightforward shift. It is fair to argue that there were two notions of virtue – civic and moral – in nineteenth century America, which were not necessarily competing, and that the importance of the first in didactic discourse on the well-being of the nation declined after the Revolution, as the influence of the second grew.

The individuals involved in these movements were generally church members and were inspired by religious conviction. However, their campaigns, though sometimes influenced or led by individual members of the clergy, were not engendered

or directed by religious organizations (with the possible exception of Quaker-led movements.) Neither were they endorsed or particularly supported by local, state or federal government. The men and women involved in the tide of 'reform' took part as individuals, yet as an organized group of individuals who had come together to change a particular aspect of American life.

The explosion in social activism began in the late 1820s and early 1830s and was most marked in the north east. This was triggered by the conjunction of various social forces; the Second Great Awakening, urbanization, internal migration and nascent industrialization weakened traditional modes of social control and influence, while creating new and challenging living conditions. The success of one movement – for example the relative electoral success of the Anti-Masonic party in carrying Vermont – tended to encourage a proliferation of other campaigns which adopted and adapted existing activist techniques. These movements gathered in momentum throughout the 1830s and 1840s, and reached a climax of activity in the 1850s.

The Sabbatarians of the 1820s offer an early example of reform. In resisting attempted violations of the Sabbath, notably the Sunday mails, the Sabbatarians attempted to conserve the religious character of the United States. According to Arthur Schlesinger Jr. 'the very defeat of the campaign against the Sunday mails only strengthened the conviction that religious-minded persons must unite to save the country from infidelity and radicalism.[111] Lyman Beecher, who was a vigorous anti-Catholic, was an important figure in the Sabbatarian movement; his argument at the time that this issue was 'perhaps the most important that ever was, or ever will be

[111] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1945), 350.

submitted for national consideration' reflects the way in which social issues were linked urgently by campaigners to the nation's well-being.[112]

Paul Goodman has argued, of the anti-Masonry campaign of the 1820s, that 'the spread of pluralism and the challenge from secularism inspired a sustained burst of creative evangelical activism that intensified people's sense that a great struggle for cultural dominance was underway.'[113] This movement was largely inspired by fears for the safety of the republic, and the rhetoric of anti-Masonry on this subject closely resembles anti-Catholic polemic. While this movement was of relatively short duration and had reached its high water mark well before the anti-convent campaign of the 1830s started, it is of interest in relation to anti-Catholicism as it seems, like Sabbatarianism, to have offered an example for subsequent 'anti' movements in terms of political organization, propaganda literature, and direct action by its adherents. While few followers appear to have gone on to join the anti-Catholic campaign, the latter movement adopted and adapted anti-Masonry's paranoid formula. There were many similarities between the beliefs and grievances of the anti-Masons and those held by nativists. Freemasonry was seen as secretive, like Catholicism, authoritarian, like Catholicism, and elitist, like Catholicism. It was also viewed, like Catholicism, as a foreign importation, claiming loyalty that rightly belonged to the nation. Anti-Masons asked

> Is it possible, that a mysterious system, of recent grandeur, can, by its dogmas, in this blessed country, urge respectable citizens grossly to

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[112] Lyman Beecher, 'Pre-eminent Importance of the Christian Sabbath', National Preacher, 3 (Mar., 1829), 156, quoted in Richard R. John, 'Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously', in Journal of the Early Republic, 10 (Winter 1990), 517. Beecher (1775-1863) was a Presbyterian minister. He was well known for his sermons and also campaigned for temperance. He was the first president of Lane Theological Seminary. His children included Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher, Henry Ward Beecher and Edward Beecher. For more on Beecher, see Marie Caskey, Chariot of Fire: Religion and the Beecher Family (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978); Vincent Harding, A Certain Magnificence: Lyman Beecher and the transformation of American Protestantism, 1775-1863 (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991).

[113] Goodman, Towards a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826-1836 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22.

> offend against the public peace; by its monstrous oaths of secrecy, withhold the truth from those legally authorized to demand it; by its scoffs and jeers, mock at the men who freely give their time and money to aid the reign of the laws! And yet does it point to our jurists and divines, our lawgivers and executive officers, as its sponsors and supporters.[114]

Religion, as has been discussed above (66, 106, 235) came to assume less importance in terms of community leadership in this period, as increased urbanization, greater mobility by clergymen, growing diversity of denominations, and other social changes combined to weaken the influence of traditional Protestantism. The reformers' efforts were based on a sense that the protection of vulnerable people had more or less devolved to those who were willing to band together to assist them. Reformers believed that slaves, drunkards, prostitutes and nuns, among other groups, required their help in order to become respectable members of society. To achieve this respectability, they believed, the vulnerable person needed to be able to earn his or her living honestly, to accept and understand the values of freedom and liberty that were so important to the American nation, and to embrace the teachings of Reformed Christianity. These writers used their narratives and romances to depict the threats posed to these aspirations by the various social forces they opposed. Of course, different reformers were hoping to reach very different groups of people. They shared a common concern, however, for individual well being, prosperity and virtue.

The safety of the American republic, the defence of its institutions, and the preservation of the values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were pressing concerns for many people in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Hence there emerged a strong strand of public discourse which aimed to alert the American people to various perceived threats to the country and its values. The narratives of social reform were part of this discourse. Each reform

[114] Anti-Masonic Review and Monthly Magazine, Vol I, No. 2 (1828), 63.

movement had its own specific aims and goals – temperance, an end to slavery, the eradication of vice, and so on. These goals, again and again, were linked by these authors to the preservation, continuance and purification of the American republic. By association, this lent weight and substance both to the reformers' causes and to the reformers themselves. Few issues were of greater importance, after all, than the fate of the nation. In the 1840s and 1850s, sectional discord meant that the likelihood of disunion itself was very great; if the union were to be dissolved then surely the freedoms and values associated with the union could also be lost.

The structure of the reforming narrative

One of the most distinctive traits of the antebellum reform movement was its reliance on the written word. Oratory was still a vital element in public discourse at this time. However, the social reform movements discussed in this chapter used novels and first-person narratives in a new way, making use of the literary conventions of fiction and autobiography to win converts in a way that was more insidious than the traditional sermons and pamphlets. Amanda Claybaugh argues that 'reform differed from earlier modes of social benevolence, such as charity, in its belief that social problems must be represented before they can be solved.'[115] In accordance with the emotionalism and immediacy of revivalism, as compared with the more intellectual and didactic modes of traditional religion, reforming writing presented novelistic and autobiographical representation of social ills, inviting their readers to connect with them on an emotional plane. Reforming writers adopted various stylistic and structural devices in order to enhance the appeal, the credibility, and the impact of their themes. The following

[115] Amanda Claybaugh, The Novel of Purpose: Literature And Social Reform in the Anglo-American World (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 2.

section will analyze some of these methods and compare the ways in which different writers used them, and will demonstrate that the convent narratives represented an important element in this literary innovation.

Some movements, especially the temperance and anti-Mormon movements, used first-person narratives and novels extensively. Others, for example the anti-Masonic campaign, used such literary genres much less. Anti-Masonry received its greatest impetus, though, from the events following William Morgan's disappearance in 1826, Morgan having threatened to publish revelations about Freemasonry. (It was widely believed that he had been kidnapped and murdered in retribution.) This scandal, occurring early in the century, illustrated the power the personal narrative already exerted.

Susan Griffin has argued that 'the formulaic conventions and formal variations of anti-Catholic fiction can be understood...as instances – rather than reflections – of the meaning making that is ideology.'[116] Convent narratives typically followed a fairly rigid plot. This pattern is evident in the narratives of the 1830s as well as in those written in the 1850s and 1860s. This reflected the generic nature of popular fiction, as well as echoing the near-obsessive way in which anti-Catholic writers dwelt again and again on the same themes. The themes of manipulation, oppression, imprisonment, spiritual and sexual seduction, violence and redemption are prominent. The basic structures remained largely the same whether the narrative itself was a genteel novel of upper middle-class girls and religious conscience, like Jane Dunbar Chaplin's The Convent and the Manse (1853), or a lurid exposé in the manner of Ned Buntline's The Beautiful Nun (1866).

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[116] Susan M. Griffin, Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

This plot structure was distinct from that of the domestic or sentimental novel, the dominant literary form of the period in terms of sales and size of readership, which typically charted the adventures of a young woman from the end of childhood to marriage.[117] While the convent narrative sometimes ended with a marriage, its central themes concerned the consequences of the protagonist's commitment to becoming a nun. In the sentimental novel, the heroine's adventures take place while she is experiencing the 'wide wide world' (one of the most popular examples is Susan Warner's novel of that name, published in 1850); in the convent narrative the world is renounced and the heroine's experiences of seclusion are the theme.[118]

There are similarities between the typical convent narrative plot and those of the temperance novels, in which the story usually starts with a marriage and goes on to detail the wife's sufferings as a result of her husband's intemperance. The idea of marriage is evoked in the convent narratives by nuns' vows - their resemblance to marriage is emphasized, although the metaphorical espousal of the nun to Christ is condemned as blasphemous.[119] The anti-convent narrative and the temperance novel both warned young women of the dangers they might face having committed themselves to a 'bad marriage' – whether to a drunkard or to a convent. Temperance campaigners blamed the diabolic properties of alcohol for the former outcome; nativists blamed the diabolic character of the Catholic church for the latter.

Another genre that used a similar plot was the anti-Mormon novel, a genre which flourished in the 1850s and 1860s. In these stories, a young and virtuous woman marries, only for her husband to convert to Mormonism and take her to Utah. As a

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[117] See for example Susan Warner, The Wide, Wide World (New York: George Putnam, 1851), Maria S. Cummins, The Lamplighter (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1854), and Louisa M. Alcott, Little Women (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1868-1869).
[118] See Warner, The Wide, Wide World.
[119] See Anonymous, Sister Agnes; or, The Captive Nun. A Picture of Convent Life, By a Clergyman's Widow (New York: Riker, Thorne & Co., 1854), 208, 210.

good and dutiful wife, the heroine cannot refuse to follow her husband, but on arriving in Utah she is confronted with the distressing reality of polygamy. After a period of wrangling, the husband – formerly loving, but corrupted by Mormonism - will marry again at least once, causing his heartbroken wife to pine. As in the convent narratives, she either dies (usually of grief) or escapes. In these novels, the destination of escapees is 'the states.' This reflects the sense of Utah having been a foreign land before 1848. Additionally, like Catholicism, Mormonism is depicted a not merely un-American in its rejection of American values, but actively anti-American.

The theme of flight to a geographic area offering safety and security resembles the escaped slave's progress north. The plots of slave narratives differed from those of anti-convent, anti-Mormon and temperance stories, in that typically the account of a former slave's troubles begins with birth rather than with marriage or with entry to a convent. However, the suffering the slave endures, and the escape attempt which is found in most of these texts, had much in common with the patterns of the convent narrative and the anti-Mormon novel. While Southern slavery was legal and institutionalized, and the bondage, whether metaphorical or actual, of nuns or Mormon women were very different, the theme of stolen freedom was treated in a similar way. In the anti-convent and anti-Mormon narratives the protagonist also typically moves 'from slavery' (the nun suffering a form of bondage) 'to freedom', and also usually declares her intention, once free, of combating the wicked forces that have enslaved her. This mirrors the escaped slave's determination to highlight the evils of slavery.

It has been shown that the plot and structure of the reforming narrative were used to further its didactic aims. The devices of captivity and flight were the narrative essence of the reforming story – whether telling the story of a woman in bondage to an intemperate or polygamous husband, or to wicked priests, or to the institution of slavery

itself. These themes are closely related to those which particularly animated participants in public discourse in this period – individual freedom, political liberty, and the danger of tyranny.

As reformers published these texts with the explicit aim of swaying opinion, they were particularly concerned to emphasize the authenticity and truth of their allegations. In The Convent's Doom (1854), Charles Frothingham claimed that his sister had been an inmate (he did not specify whether she was a nun or a scholar) in the Ursuline convent at Charlestown.[120] (There is no evidence to substantiate this claim and the internal evidence of his various anti-convent stories suggests that he had at best only a very vague knowledge of either the Ursuline convent or convents in general.) Sarah Richardson, in her narrative Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (1858), confronted head-on, and thereby attempted to defuse, the potential cynicism of her readers. She also linked her narrative, and by extension her anti-convent message, to the anti-slavery campaign:

> You pity the poor black man who bends beneath the scourge of southern bondage, for the tale comes to you from those who have seen his tears and heard his groans. But you have no tears, no prayers, no efforts for the poor helpless nun who toils and dies beneath the heartless cruelty of an equally oppressive task-master. No; for her you have no sympathy, for you do not believe her word….Even now, methinks, I see your haughty brow contract, and your lip curl with scorn, as with supreme contempt you throw down these pages and exclaim, " 'Tis all a fiction. Just got up to make money."[121]

Writers who supported other 'reforming' movements similarly felt obliged to protest the authenticity of their claims. They followed this trend from the 1830s onwards; for example, Theodore Weld's American Slavery As It Is (1839) pleads its truthfulness in its subtitle, Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses, before the reader has even opened the

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[120] Charles Frothingham, The Convent's Doom: A Tale of Charleston in 1834: Also The Haunted Convent (Boston: Graves and Weston, 1854), 3. See also Frothingham, Six Hours in a Convent; or, The Stolen Nuns! (Boston: Graves and Weston, 1855), 5.

[121] Sarah Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery at Montreal (Boston: Damrell & Moore, 1857), 26.

book. Fictional works were commonly prefaced with assurances that the events of the plot were based on true ones; the preface to T.S. Arthur's Ten Nights in a Bar-Room (1854) stressed its credibility by stating that 'the book is marred by no exaggeration, but exhibits the actualities of bar-room life, and the consequences flowing therefrom, with a severe simplicity, and adherence to truth, that gives to every picture a Daguerrean vividness.'[122]

Authors used various literary techniques to endow their narratives with credibility. For example, Frederick Douglass used the phrase 'written by himself' to underline his authorship of, and, in a sense, ownership of his Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845) and to refute any suggestion that it was not his own work.[123] Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote an entire book (The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1853) with the aim of presenting evidence to validate the claims she had made in Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), in response to demand from (principally Southern) readers. The narrator of the anti-slavery novel The Martyrs (1859) forestalls his readers' enquiries, writing that 'the reader may wish to know whether the following pages are fictitious or historical. They are both.'[124] In this work, a former slave, Cæsar, has recounted his tale to the book's narrator, whose sister asks him 'But can you rely upon his statement?' This gives the narrator the opportunity to lay his proofs before his readers; 'O yes. He gave so many dates and names of persons and places, and I cross-questioned him so closely, that what he says must be true. Besides, I have independent proof from other sources.'[125] While the narrator offers his own views of slavery, the interjections and questions added by his sister create the impression that his argument is being scrutinized and tested - the

[122] 'Preface,' T.S. Arthur, Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, And What I Saw There (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1964 [1854]), 3.
[123] Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1845]).
[124] Smith H. Platt, The Martyrs, and The Fugitive; or, A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Death of an African Family, and the Slavery and Escape of the Their Son (New York: Daniel Fanshaw, 1859), 3.
[125] Platt, The Martyrs, 6.

sister being the proxy for the reader. And of course, at every juncture the narrator's anti-slavery arguments convince his hearer – as they will convince, it is implied, the reader.

The convent narratives reinforced the idea that these texts required the support of external evidence by their inclusion of elements such as footnotes, depositions and references to other texts. Furthermore, Susan Griffin argues, 'anti-Catholic texts claim to offer information impartially and to defer to their audience's judgment of the facts.'[126] The narratives recognized that the issue of authenticity was problematic. The appearance of women in public life, even by proxy in the form of a published text, was highly dubious, even repugnant, to many. Even worse, these women had been Catholics, with all the negative associations this implied to a preponderantly anti-Catholic Protestant public. They were vow-breakers – however much opponents of convents argued that such vows were meaningless, there may still have remained an aura of untrustworthiness about them. Finally, some of the 'escaped nuns,' most notably Maria Monk, were known to be 'fallen women' – even if they were the victims of seduction or rape by unscrupulous priests, to some readers this could conceivably have rendered their testimony (whether they were real figures or fictional characters) null and void. To combat this, the creators of the convent narratives used literary techniques to enhance the credibility of the narratives.

One of the ways in which convent narratives sought to establish the honesty of their protagonists, as well as to deflect any accusations of unwomanly behaviour (see Chapter 3) was to insist that the escaped nun only told her story with reluctance, and for the greater good of society as a whole. Reverend Edwin P. Hood, the editor of Sarah

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[126] Susan Griffin, 'Awful Disclosures: Women's Evidence in the Escaped Nun's Tale', PMLA 111:1(Jan., 1996), 98.

Richardson's Life in the Grey Nunnery (1858), wrote of Richardson's fears about coming forward:

> Mrs. Richardson had often been advised to allow her history to be placed before the public. But she always replied, "For my life I would not do it. Not because I do not wish the world to know it, for I would gladly proclaim it wherever a Romanist is known, but it would be impossible for me to escape." After her marriage, however, her principal objection was removed. She thought they would not wish to take her back…and her husband would protect her. She therefore related the story of her life while in the convent.[127]

As was the case with the anti-slavery campaign, many anti-Catholics were engaged in writing tracts and editing newspapers haranguing readers on the dangers of Catholicism. However, when it came to creating a popular work, nothing beat the 'true' nuns' tales Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery (1836) and Six Months in a Convent (1835.) Admittedly their success was related to the appetite of the reading public for sensation. However, the immediacy of the first-person voice helped these texts to far outsell any other anti-Catholic works, even sensationalistic ones like the various salacious annotated versions of Dens' Theology, lurid as they were.[128] Use of the first-person, with its associations of conversion narratives, autobiography and reportage, lent a degree of credibility to the most far-fetched tales, and was used by reforming authors to reach the hearts of their readers, as Beth Maclay Doriani argues:

> In the case of the slave narrative, experienced abolitionists realized that the first-person narrative, with its promise of intimate glimpses into the mind and heart, would be more compelling to the uncommitted mass of readers than the oratory and polemics of the antislavery press.[129]

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[127] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 209.

[128] The theological lectures entitled Theologia ad usum seminorium (Mechlin, 1777) were attributed to Peter Dens (1690-1775) and published two years after his death. Several editions of the work were issued by Protestant editors who presented annotated extracts of its 'manual of confession' for Catholic priests, which supposedly encouraged them to use confession to interrogate women on sexual matters. The Library of Congress holds a version published in Philadelphia in 1841 and edited by the prolific anti-Catholic lecturer Rev. Dr. Joseph F. Berg (1812-1871.) This went into four editions, the fourth issued in 1856. An separate edition was published in New York in 1843.

[129] Beth Maclay Doriani, 'Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies', American Quarterly, 43:2 (1991), 206.

These lessons were well-learned by the authors of the convent narratives published in the 1850s and 1860s. Sarah Richardson's narrative, published in 1858, uses the first-person throughout as Richardson directly addresses the reader, in a way calculated to win sympathy, as in this extract: 'I turned to my father, and with tears and sobs entreated him not to send me away with that man [a priest], but allow me to stay at home with him.'[130] Fictional accounts also used the first person. For example, in The City Side (1854), the escaped nun Nell Crowninshield tells of her seduction by a priest: 'I had taken a fearful leap, and could not return. I was not what I was before.'[131]

The sensationalism found in some convent narratives has already been touched upon. It is clear that their success was, at least in part, attributable to this facet of their appeal. These texts accused Catholic priests and nuns of perpetrating sexual crimes and living immoral lives, thus emphasizing the dangers of Catholicism; at the same time these stories gave readers the opportunity to read salacious material while maintaining a virtuous horror of it.[132] This approach, while by no means innovative, led to huge sales and gave the narratives a fame that endures today.

Some of the narratives presented scenes of sexualized torture, for example Buntline's The Beautiful Nun (1866): 'Quick as thought, one of the hideous attendants tore the dress from the upper part of the form of poor Constanza, leaving her lovely neck and shoulders bare. Then another with a knotted scourge of many thongs stepped

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130 Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 6.

131 Cara Belmont, The City Side; or, Passages from a Pastor's Portfolio (Boston: Phillips, Samson and Company, 1854), 251.

132 See the 1830s narratives by George Bourne, Lorette: Or, the History of Louise, Daughter of a Canadian Nun (New York: W.A. Mercein, 1833), Samuel B. Smith (ed.) Rosamond Culbertson: or, A Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of an American Female Under Popish Priests (James S. Hodson: London, 1837 [1836]), Maria Monk, Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery (New York: Howe and Bates, 1836), and the 1850s works by Ned Buntline, The Beautiful Nun (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson & Brothers, 1866), Eliza Dupuy, The Mysterious Marriage (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson & Brothers, c.1853) and Orvilla Belisle, The Arch Bishop; or, Romanism in the United States (Philadelphia: Wm White Smith, 1855.)

forward.'[133] Other reforming narratives also represented such scenes. Maria Ward's novel Female Life Among the Mormons (1855) contains a scene in which a recalcitrant woman is punished for questioning polygamy: '[She] was taken one night when she stepped out for water, gagged, carried a mile into the woods, stripped nude, tied to a tree, and scourged till the blood ran from her wounds to the ground, in which condition she was left till the next night.'[134] The anti-slavery novel The Martyrs (1859) graphically described another scene of sadistic torture:

> There, under the shed, hung by the thumbs the naked and writhing form of a beautiful quadroon girl of sixteen summers, and by her stood a burly, drunken villain, holding in one hand a bloody knife, and in the other the dripping cowskin, alternately swearing, maiming, and whipping, and she groaning, writhing, and almost dying. He had bought her for the basest of purposes, and when she had refused his will and resisted his pollution, and then tried by running away to escape from his power, all the fiend was aroused within him.[135]

While some narratives described such scenes explicitly, others, with more pretensions to respectability, drew a veil over them, allowing readers to imagine (and perhaps revel in) their own scenes of horror. George Bourne wrote that 'the aggravated corruptions [of slavery], no pen can describe, and no unpolluted imagination conceive.'[136] Griffin describes how, in the narrative Rosamond Culbertson (1836), the footnotes of editor Samuel B. Smith invite the reader to use his or her imagination: 'Smith sets up a continuum – horrible, fully accessible facts in English; worse, less accessible facts in Latin; still worse and even less accessible facts in Spanish; and inaccessible but by this point fully imaginable facts that are omitted – that invites reader

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[133] Buntline, The Beautiful Nun., 31.
[134] Maria Ward, Female Life Among the Mormons (New York: J.C. Derby, 1855), quoted in Eric A. Eliason, 'Curious Gentiles and Representational Authority in the City of the Saints', Religion and American Culture 11:2 (Summer, 2001), 159.
[135] Platt, The Martyrs, 42.
[136] 'A Puritan' [George Bourne], The Abrogation of the Seventh Commandment in the American Churches (New York, 1835) 3-4, quoted in Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism', 90.

participation in the pornographic construction of undeniable truth.'[137] Carol Lasser argued that 'distancing the spectator from spectacle, while still revealing its power to stimulate and excite the spectator, the rhetoric thus became voyeuristic.'[138]

The technique of obscuring, while revealing, was also used by Increase Van Dusen who wrote an exposé of Mormon customs in 1850 (the influence of Maria Monk is suggested by the somewhat derivative title of Startling Disclosures); 'Many things are practiced within this secret organization after being initiated, which, if written out, would be perfectly obscene.'[139] Orvilla Belisle, herself the author of an anti-Mormon novel (The Prophets, 1855) similarly used this technique in her anti-Catholic novel The Arch Bishop (also 1855), describing the ordeal of a nun at the hands of a lecherous priest; 'It is not our province to dwell on the tortures inflicted on her, but to spare those to whom she was dear who still survive, to mourn over the crimes practiced in the name of the sin-polluted church.'[140] This effect is replicated in the novel Boadicea; or, the Mormon Wife (1856):

> I fell down in a death-like swoon. On my recovery, the corpses of Mary Maxwell and Yale's masked companion, Yale himself, and every trace of the bloody murder, had vanished; but for the trampled flowers of my garden, and the ghastly remembrance which will remain in my heart until my dying day, I could have believed it all a dream.[141]

The narrator's faint protects her, and the reader, from the sordid horror of the murder's aftermath. These examples illustrate the way reforming texts used illicit imagery both for commercial and ideological ends. They offered a locus for the contemplation of

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137 Griffin, 'Awful Disclosures,' 99.
138 Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism', 95.
139 I. McGee Van Dusen, Startling Disclosures of the Wonderful Ceremonies of the Mormon Spiritual-Wife System. Being the Celebrated 'Endowment,' As it was acted by Upwards of Twelve Thousand Men and Women in Secret at the Nauvoo Temple, in 1846, And Said to Have Been Revealed from God (New York: Blake and Jackson, 1850), ii.
140 Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 74.
141 Alfreda Eva Bell, Boadicea; or, The Mormon Wife: Life-Scenes in Utah (Baltimore: Arthur R. Orton, 1856), 49.

forbidden imagery, while they reinforced their opposition to forces they perceived as oppressive by associating them with sexual crime.

The convent narratives used stereotypical characterization to further their didactic ends. There were exceptions, like the amoral (by her own account) Maria Monk and the bizarre Jane Ray, a character in Monk's Awful Disclosures.[142] Such idiosyncratic characters were unusual. In the convent tales of the 1850s and 1860s, however, there was little if anything to distinguish the parade of virtuous, victimized heroines and their brave deliverers from each other in terms of personality. This was also true of the popular novels of the day, by writers such as E.D.E.N. Southworth and Susan Warner. While today's readers and critics regard stereotyped characters as symptomatic of a writer's failure of imagination, it would be wrong to dismiss the narratives of the 1850s and 1860s as simply inept. Just as medieval religion used iconography to reinforce Christian principles in a non-literate population, the sentimental literature of the 1850s used archetypal characters to reinforce the social mores of their authors. There is no evidence that their readers resented this, as sales of sentimental literature were huge.

The imperiled young nun was one stereotype which had its counterpart in the heartbroken young wife of the anti-Mormon novel, the abused wife of the temperance story, and the young girl tempted to a life of vice in the moral reform tale. The heroine was invariably beautiful, as in Madelon Hawley (1857), where the author writes of Miss Hawley 'shall I vainly endeavor to portray the shining purity of her complexion; the soft luster of her great black eyes; the queenly redundance of her raven ringlets, and the voluptuousness of her flowing and graceful form?'[143] Furthermore, the heroine was affectionate and home-loving, like Eugenia Altenberg in The Huguenot Exiles (1856),

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142 Monk, Awful Disclosures, 12.
143 William Earle Binder, Madelon Hawley, or, The Jesuit and His Victim: A Revelation of Romanism (New York: H. Dayton, 1857), 53.

'formed by nature to be the charm of her home – the living sunbeam to the heart that was so fortunate as to win her affections.'[144] Apart from these very general characteristics these heroines are difficult to differentiate.

The wicked Mother Superior was another stereotype which anti-slavery writings echoed; they poured particular condemnation on the women slaveholders of the south. In The Martyrs (1859), the slaveowner's wife, Mrs. Halman, is just as cruel as her husband, 'with an ungovernable temper, goaded by her ill-starred position into constant fretfulness, which made her both cruel and vengeful.'[145] Douglass wrote of his female owner

> The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrible discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon.[146]

The anti-Mormon literature had its own example of this stereotype in its presentation of older women who were supportive of polygamy, or who had suffered by it and took out their frustrations on younger women, for example in this extract from the novel Brigham Young's Daughter (1870) by Wesley Bradshaw:

> The brave girl leaped to her feet, flew to a little wardrobe, dressed herself hastily in a simple street costume and started for the door. At this juncture, however, two sour faced old women, who were two of the first wives of the Prophet, suddenly entered the room, and, pushing Ella roughly back closed the door securely.[147]

The Mother Superior and these Mormon women are painted as old or at least older women, and there is a strong streak of hostility to older women wielding power and influence in these narratives. This may explain the dearth of reforming women in the

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144 Eliza Dupuy, The Huguenot Exiles; Or, The Times of Luis XIV. A Historical Novel (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 224-225.
145 Platt, The Martyrs., 40.
146 Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 78.
147 Wesley Bradshaw, Brigham Young's Daughter. A Most Thrilling Narrative of Her Escape from Utah, With Her Intended Husband, Their Pursuit by the Mormon Danites or Avenging Angels (Philadelphia: C.W. Alexander, 1870), 35.

convent narratives. Virtuous mature women who wielded their influence for good were virtually absent while those older women who did appear, especially unmarried or widowed women, were portrayed as thwarted, ugly, wicked and frustrated. They were accused of manipulating people, especially younger women, from motives of spite or acquisitiveness. There is an obvious link here to the witch trials of the seventeenth century and a similar irrational and paranoid view of older women and power is evident in these texts.

Perhaps the most important stock character to be used by the anti-convent writers was the scheming villain. In the convent narratives this was the figure of the priest, who tricked and manipulated virtuous Protestants, unused to such machinations. This character also appeared the form of the polygamous Mormon leader. These authors appear to have been influenced by an archetypal character that has been identified by Karen Halttunen – the 'confidence man.' While other reforming genres did not necessarily have an exact equivalent, in many cases they reveal the influence of this archetype and the thinking that led to his creation.

Halttunen has argued that reformers used the theme of the 'confidence man' to illustrate the dangers posed by hypocrisy and deceit to the survival of the republic and its values. She argued that these writers also used this stock character to explain the descent of the virtuous individual, particularly the young person, into immorality or error, and to illustrate the threat posed by such figures to the welfare of the individual and the social harmony of the community. This idea is, according to Halttunen, a manifestation of anxiety surrounding social change.[148]

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[148] Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 13.

Halttunen calls the confidence man 'a master of human psychology, who specialized in the passions and caprices of youth.'[149] She argues that the trope emerged in advice literature from the 1830s onwards into the 1850s and 1860s. Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), a clergyman and abolitionist, and son of Lyman Beecher, described this process in detail in his cautionary book, Seven Lectures to Young Men (1844): 'These wild gushes of feeling, peculiar to youth, the sagacious tempter has felt, has studied, has practiced upon, until he can sit before that most capricious organ, the human mind, knowing every stop and all the combinations, and competent to touch every note beyond the diapason.'[150]

Although Beecher was principally concerned about the threat posed by gamblers, swindlers and criminals to the virtue and safety of young men, his description of the confidence man's ability to manipulate could clearly apply to the supposed machinations of priests, Mormon elders, procurers, and the like. The stereotype of the confidence man represented smiling danger, the danger of fair words and hypocrisy. This use of the trope of the confidence man manifests many of the deepest concerns felt by reforming writers in the middle of the nineteenth century. They were worried about social change; the mobility of the changing society facilitated hypocrisy and destabilized well-established social hierarchies and networks. They believed that these changes had deleterious effects that they described in their literature; effects that could be potentially harmful to the individual's happiness and well-being, to their rights as citizens and human beings, and to the health of the republic itself.

It has been demonstrated that, consciously or unconsciously, the reforming writers of the 1850s and 1860s used a variety of literary techniques to buttress the

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[149] Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women , 5.
[150] Henry Ward Beecher, Seven Lectures to Young Men (1844), 90, quoted in Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women, 5.

substance of their novelized arguments. There is a remarkable degree of correlation between the different genres. The reformers did not go to the trouble of writing a book merely in order to preach to the converted; they sought to address the wider public and to gain new adherents and to do so they used the conventions and styles of the most popular novels of the day. Various techniques were used by these authors to enhance their tales' credibility, in order to convert readers to their causes. These stylistic methods also emphasized these texts' messages and themes, and rendered the stories interesting and appealing to their desired readership. In the novels of social reform, structure and style were important because they were the supporting architecture of the reformer's argument.

The reformers

The reforming impulse was a strong one and once an individual became involved in a reform movement, he or she was likely to embrace others. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., sketched the career of an early activist, Benjamin Hallett, illustrating the diversity of the causes he supported:

> The sudden devotion in 1836 of Benjamin F. Hallett to the anti-monopoly cause brought forward [an] …unprincipled careerist. Hallett's brief political past had already revealed his main characteristic: an unswerving loyalty to any party so long as it promised personal advantage. His own reputation was established in the Anti-Masonic movement. When Anti-Masonry began to founder, Hallett dallied with Garrison and the abolitionists, towards whom he had been friendly when the press was almost unanimously hostile; with the anti-Catholic movement, which he assisted by writing an introduction to Six Months in a Convent; and with Edward Everett and the Whigs, with whom he was intriguing in 1835, at the same time denouncing strikes and the ten-hour day. But in 1836 he finally made up his mind and sprang forth, full-panoplied, into the ranks of the radical Democrats.[151]

[151] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 174. Benjamin Hallett (1797-1861) was born in Barnstable, Massachusetts; he worked as a journalist before

The brothers Arthur and Lewis Tappan were also involved in an impressive variety of causes. Arthur, for example, supported the anti-slavery movement, moral reform, Sabbatarianism and temperance, and was a member of the anti-Catholic group which caused Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures to be published.[152] Hallett and the Tappans were very different, and are extreme examples, but they illustrate the opportunities for reform-minded individuals to take part in a range of movements.

This cross-pollination of reforming tendencies also applied to reforming texts themselves. For example, Osgood Bradbury's novel Female Depravity (1857) is primarily a moral reform novel but the text also conveys the author's abolitionist sympathies; the virtuous Mr. Hapgood 'was somewhat Abolition-inclined' and the Negro servant Ben is a positive portrayal of an ex-slave who is morally superior to his Northern employers, the lecherous Captain Robinson and his son Frank, a thieving gambler.[153] The reforming authors noted and used the similarities between their targets. Anti-Masonic literature likened Freemasons to intriguing Catholic priests, especially the Jesuits: 'The organization of Freemasonry, like that of Jesuitism, is complicated and mysterious.' (This early extract, from 1828, suggests that for this anonymous author Catholicism and Jesuitism serve as straightforward examples of wickedness needing no explanation.)[154]

William E. Gienapp has argued that many reformers shared a degree of hostility to Irish immigrants: 'For both Know Nothings and temperance crusaders besotted Irish

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joining the bar. He ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 1844 and 1848 and was the first Chairman of the Democratic National Committee (1848-1852.) He served as US District Attorney for Massachusetts from 1853-1857 under the Pierce administration. He was a member of the Convention that nominated John C Breckinridge for the presidency in 1860.

[152] Arthur Tappan (1786-1865) and Lewis Tappan (1788-1873) were successful businessmen. Their brother, Benjamin (1773-1857), was a Democratic politician who represented Ohio in the United States Senate.

[153] Bradbury, Female Depravity, 85.

[154] Anti-Masonic Review and Monthly Magazine, Vol. I, No. 10 (1828) 316.

Catholics functioned as their primary negative-reference group. The Chicago Tribune, which merged reports of Irish drunkenness and disorder with nativist arguments, rhetorically asked, 'Who does not know that the most depraved, debased, worthless and irredeemable drunkards and sots which curse the community, are Irish Catholics?'[155] Formisano goes further, arguing that 'nativism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Southernism, anti-slavery and racism did not flow through the political universe in neatly separate streams…Popery, Slavery, Party and Rum permeated one another with emotional resonance.'[156] This interpretation is borne out by a Republican newspaper in Maine which claimed in 1854 that 'SLAVERY, RUM AND FOREIGNERS' were 'three allied powers' that were 'the worst foes of our liberties.'[157] In Ten Nights in a Bar-Room (1854), T.S. Arthur indicated the decline of the formerly cheerful inn using anti-Irish (and by implication anti-Catholic) imagery: 'Two greasy-looking Irish girls waited on the table, at which neither landlord nor landlady presided.'[158] Of course, the Irish priest Father Mathew was closely associated with temperance and it would be misleading to suggest that intemperance was inevitably seen as an Irish vice. However, anti-Catholics did use stereotypes of Irish drunkenness to further their arguments.

There were other connections. The author of The Prophets (1855) linked the causes of anti-Mormonism, nativism and anti-slavery in an aside to the reader:

> The question has more than once occurred, whether a community could, in the Eastern States, have outraged the laws as long as the Mormons did in Missouri, without calling down upon them the wrath or an indignant populace. I am no apologist for lynch or mob law, but there have occasions occurred, and may again, when the people have arisen in their might and bid the tyrant's vice and oppression begone. So they did at

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155 Chicago Tribune, 20 March, 1854, quoted in Gienapp, 'Nativism and the End of the Mass Migration of the 1840s and 1850s', Journal of Economic History 60:2 (June 2000), 535.

156 Formisano, 'To The Editor', Civil War History 21 (June, 1975), 188, quoted in William E. Gienapp, 'Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North before the Civil War', Journal of American History 72:3 (December 1985), 531.

157 Kennebec Journal, 1 Dec., 1854, quoted in Gienapp, 'Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority,' 531.

158 Arthur, Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, 125.

> Lexington and New Orleans, and so they did at Philadelphia in 1844, and so they were doing in Missouri now [i.e. 1838-1839].[159]

(The author is writing in 1855 and looking back to 1838-1839, while invoking the example of events that occurred in 1844 – providing an instructive example of her confused and hysterical style.)

With regard specifically to the relation between anti-slavery and anti-Catholicism, Grimsted argues that 'the Roman Catholic Church and large, though decreasing, segments of Northern Protestantism continued to insist that slavery was an evil, a God-sanctioned one, and hence not a sin, so that guilt only accrued in relation to the way it was practiced.'[160] Pope Gregory XVI had condemned the slave trade in the encyclical In Supremo Apostolis (1839.) However, Irish immigrants were widely reputed to be hostile to the anti-slavery movement and abolitionism in particular. While Daniel O'Connell had championed William Garrison and his movement, the influential Archbishop John Hughes of New York discouraged Catholics from participating. George Bourne, the author of the early convent narrative Lorette (1833) and associate of Maria Monk, who was best known as an abolitionist, even claimed in 1845 that the Catholic church was responsible for slavery itself: 'As a historical fact worthy of notice in this connection it is proper to state, that the practice of negro slavery among Christians, as well as the scriptural perversions by which it was justified, first originated among the members of [the Catholic] Church.'[161] The belief that Catholicism necessarily equated support for slavery, though a facile one, persisted even in historical circles as far as the 1940s, when Schlesinger wrote 'After becoming a Catholic, of

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[159] Orvilla S. Belisle, The Prophets; or, Mormonism Unveiled, (Philadelphia: Wm. White Smith, 1855), 227.
[160] David Grimsted, American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39.
[161] George Bourne, A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1845), 14.

course, [Orestes Brownson] encountered little difficulty in clothing slavery with plausible moral justification.'[162]

From the evidence above it appears clear that reformers in different movements felt a shared hostility to Catholics and Irish immigrants. They also tended to share pro-temperance views. Carol Mattingly argues that 'scarcely a popular nineteenth-century woman's novel exists that does not make reference to intemperance, attesting to its inherent dangers.'[163] In the anti-convent novel Danger in the Dark (1854) the hero, Alonzo Carleton, experiences alcoholism; 'eventually, by occasionally indulging in strong drink, he became the slave of an unnatural appetite, and gave himself up to drunkenness, revelry and gaming; and very soon was reduced to poverty and utter destitution.'[164] In the moral reform novel Female Depravity (1857), Captain Robinson swears to forego alcohol, arguing that 'I never drank...to excess, but my example has been bad before those that do.' The anti-slavery novel, The Martyrs (1859) links drinking to violence; the cruel slaveholder, Colonel Halman, is 'a short, fleshy, stout-built, red-faced, gray-headed, hard-drinking man.'[165]

One of the major debates in the historiography of the reformers has centred on their status in the society they lived in – historians like Bertram Wyatt-Brown and David Donald have asked whether they were upwardly mobile, or resentfully declining in social prestige. Some scholars have viewed the reformers as a discontented and disempowered minority, who felt that their influence over society had eroded. Donald wrote in 1956 that 'abolitionism should be considered the anguished protest of an aggrieved class

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[162] Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson, 425.
[163] Carol Mattingly, Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 143.
[164] Kelso, Danger in the Dark, 144.
[165] Platt, The Martyrs, 40.

against a world they never made.'[166] Louis Filler has outlined the arguments made by critics of abolitionists and other reformers:

> In the opinion of their critics, the abolitionists were no more than partisans of rural and conservative interests, largely of Congregationalist-Presbyterian background, whose prestige had been undermined by social upstarts and a newly influential industrial class aligned with the slaveholding interest, and whose women had been deprived of dignified marriage opportunities. Accordingly, they hit upon abolitionist, woman's rights, and related reforms in order to re-establish themselves as arbiters in public affairs.[167]

David Grimsted has, however, argued against this view, based on biographical information about abolitionists:

> [David] Donald claimed that his sampling showed that abolitionists were of old families who were being left behind in a developing industrial age, but his pattern is the opposite of what one finds in the Dictionary of American Biography, where at least 90 percent of that sample achieved more education and success than had their parents, even at the beginning of their abolitionist works.[168]

The most important conclusion to draw from the work carried out so far on the backgrounds of the reformers is that much remains to be done. It is also important to avoid over-generalizing from one group to another. The need for further research is especially pressing in the case of the anti-convent writers, who in most cases have remained obscure and shadowy figures. Unlike many of the abolitionists, their backgrounds and motivations can, for the most part, currently only be analyzed by a study of their work.

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[166] See Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951 [1943]), 376; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, 'Prelude to Abolitionism: Sabbatarian Politics and the Rise of the Second Party System', Journal of American History 58 (September 1971), 339; David Donald, 'Towards a Reconsideration of Abolitionists,' in Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War (New York: Knopf, 1956), 36.

[167] Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 28-29.

[168] Grimsted, American Mobbing, 46.

Republicanism in the reforming narratives

The reforming narratives were concerned to promote agendas that overlapped in many crucial respects. One of the most prominent themes was republicanism. Many participants in reform movements were motivated by a fear that the American republic was imperilled. This sense was closely linked to the rapid pace of social, political and economic change in this period. Increased popular participation in politics was accompanied, many believed, by demagoguery; increasing mechanization and embryonic mass production had caused the erosion of traditional artisan-apprentice relationships; the growth and consolidation of great banking and mercantile houses concentrated too much power, some thought, in the hands of an economic elite; a 'new' immigration of Irish and Germans (mainly Catholics) had diluted the religious, cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the nation. The republican ideals which were of such importance to the United States seemed to be endangered, both by the rapid pace of change and by the nature of the changes, which, to those who were not involved in effecting them, or who did not benefit by them, embodied the spirit of individualism at its most selfish. The American republic had always honoured individualism, but as a means of furthering freedom and ultimately strengthening the state, rather than as an end in itself.

Authors argued that republicanism was virtuous and American; that their opponents were anti-republican; and that their opponents were therefore vicious and anti-American. Anti-Masons had argued the practices of Freemasonry were contrary to the precepts of republicanism. In the 1850s and 1860s this tradition continued. In Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), Harriet Beecher Stowe used an exchange between the kindly slave-owner St. Clare and his tyrannical brother Alfred to condemn slavery on these grounds. They are discussing Alfred's son Henrique and his treatment of a slave, Dodo:

> "Henrique is a regular tempest; - his mother and I have given him up, long ago. But, then, that Dodo is a perfect sprite, - no amount of whipping can hurt him."
>
> "And this by way of teaching Henrique the first verse of a republican's catechism, 'All men are born free and equal!' "
>
> "Poh!" said Alfred; "one of Tom Jefferson's pieces of French sentiment and humbug. It's perfectly ridiculous to have that going the rounds among us, to this day."
>
> "I think it is," said St. Clare, significantly.[169]

Alfred St. Clare holds an aristocratic set of values and represents slavery's unfair domination of the many by the few. His brother, by contrast, is aware of the virtues of republicanism, and conscious of the nation's failure to uphold these values. For Stowe and other anti-slavery writers, the republican experiment had already failed, and they wanted to restore it to its former purity.

Mormons were attacked as anti-republican well into the 1860s. C.V. Waite argued that Mormonism represented a serious threat to the republic in 1867:

> The only form of religion in this country which refuses to conform either to the spirit of progress and improvement and enlightened humanity which characterizes the age in which we live, or to our laws and the genius of our free institutions, - drawing constantly from foreign countries hosts of votaries, impelled hither *not* by a love of republicanism, but rather by a desire to exchange a political for a religious monarchy, - is Mormonism which presents an antagonism to our Government, and can scarcely fail to result in national trouble.[170]

This extract suggests that Waite bore no animus towards Catholicism, demonstrating that reformers sometimes attacked different groups for the same reasons.

The reforming texts reveal that their authors believed in the existence of external conspiracies against the United States and against republican government and institutions, bearing out Hofstadter's theory of the 'paranoid mindset.' Ronald G. Walters describes this fear as 'an innately suspicious mentality which characterized many antebellum reformers as well as non-reformers. It blamed the nation's troubles on

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169 Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1981 [1852]), 390-391.

170 Waite, The Mormon Prophet and His Harem, iii.

conspiracies of one sort or another – by the Slave Power, liquor dealers, Masons, the Catholic Church, or politicians and clergy serving special interests.'[171]

According to their respective opponents, Masons, Catholics and Mormons had overthrown the rule of law and the principles of democracy and republicanism in other places, and the idea that they might be plotting to effect a similar overthrow throughout the United States was consequently far from far-fetched. For example, as the 1850s progressed, the anti-slavery movement came to be powered more and more by Northern fear of Southern tyranny, as Eric Foner argues:

> By the late 1850s, it had become a standard part of Republican rhetoric to accuse the Slave Power of a long series of transgressions against northern rights and liberties and to predict that, unless halted by effective political action, the ultimate aim of the conspiracy – the complete subordination of the national government to slavery and the suppression of northern liberties – would be accomplished.[172]

Judge Deodatus Wright had written in 1856 that 'the Republican party does not owe its existence to a desire, or a design, to "ameliorate the condition of the negro," but to a firm, fixed and resolute purpose to relieve themselves, the people of the North, from an oppression similar in character, and from a proscription as intollerant [sic] as those to which our [Founding] fathers were subjected.'[173]

Writing in 1855, Belisle described Catholic missionaries to the United States in conspiratorial terms: 'Emissaries, laden with the poisons that had desolated Europe and clothed in the garb of peace, flooded every mountain and vale where a freeman had reared his cottage – smiling softly, winningly, treading noiselessly, but leaving a slimy track behind to show the path of the reptile.'[174] Belisle's description strongly evokes the

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171 Walters, American Reformers, 10.
172 Eric Foner, Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 49.
173 Deodatus Wright (1812-1900), Two Letters to Gov. Hunt In Reply to his Letter of August 8th, 1856, 16, quoted in Rush Welter, The Mind of America 1820-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 353-354.
174 Belisle, The Arch Bishop, 18.

manipulations and deceit of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and, by extension, compares the United States to Eden itself, warning that the republic may be lost as irretrievably as Paradise, through the machinations of the Catholic church.

Opponents of Mormonism similarly characterized Mormons as conspirators. Van Dusen claimed in 1850 that 'the most daring and dangerous conspiracy ever formed against the liberties of man, is now plotted against your country!...Their secret object is the overthrow of this government.'[175] He claimed that Mormons swore an oath to vanquish the republic:

> "You do solemnly swear in the presence of Almighty God…that you will avenge the blood of Joseph Smith on this nation, and teach the same to your children; and that you will, from this time henceforth and forever, begin and carry out hostilities against the nation, and to keep the same intent a powerful secret, now and for ever."[176]

Mormon proselytizing imperiled the safety of the nation by importing thousands of ignorant European converts, argued Bradshaw in 1870: 'hundreds and perhaps thousands of "Missionaries"…like deadly serpents crawl about through Europe and other lands, instilling into unthinking minds the pernicious doctrines of Mormonism.'[177]

Many reforming writers were, as shown above, near-obsessed with the dangers posed to American democracy by the forces they opposed. They were also concerned with threats to the liberties both of the nation and of individuals. Again, this was a common element in the public discourse of the time, and again it was inspired in part by the social, political and economic changes taking place.

The reforming narratives emphasized the importance of liberty to their protagonists. Stowe wrote in Uncle Tom's Cabin of the escaped slave George, who exclaims 'I'll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe. You say your fathers did it;

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[175] Van Dusen, Startling Disclosures, 3.
[176] Van Dusen, Startling Disclosures, 15.
[177] Bradshaw, Brigham Young's Daughter, 68.

if it was right for them, it is right for me!'[178] Four years later in 1856 the novel Mormon Wives invoked the virtues of the Founders: 'Let us not be deceived longer, but open our eyes to the serpent now asking to be warmed into life by our national hearth-stone; let us arise and say, "Away leper! cleanse thyself! And then come, and we…will protect thee as our fathers protected Bunker Hill." '[179] Two years after this Sarah Richardson declaimed 'Sons of America! Will you not arise in your might, and demand that these convent doors be opened, and "the oppressed" allowed to "go free"?'[180]

The 'anti' literature was particularly concerned with the individual's rights over his or her own person, and these works depict characters who have lost or who are in danger of losing these rights as a result of the machinations of evil forces. This theme naturally linked to slavery, the most important and divisive political issue of the day. In Female Depravity (1857), the evil Mrs. Rudolf, who tries to sell the virtuous Fanny Dumont to the libertine Captain Robinson, tells her 'You were given to me when you were a mere child, and I have full power to make you mind me, and I'm determined to do it.'[181] Sarah Richardson learns, in Life in the Grey Nunnery (1858), that 'now, a slave for life, I could have no will of my own, I must go at bidding, and come at command. This, I am well aware, may seem to some extravagant language; but I use the right word.' [182] Forced to labor, her slavery is literal, not figurative.) In the anti-slavery novel The Martyrs (1859) the young quadroon slave Josette, sold to a licentious owner for $2,000, is found dead after attempting to escape him. Her fate is mourned by the

[178] Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin, 187.
[179] Metta Victoria Fuller Victor, Mormon Wives (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), vii.
[180] Sarah Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 26.
[181] Bradbury, Female Depravity, 12.
[182] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 25.

author; 'Thirteen weeks and four days was that poor slave wandering thus, an exile and a criminal, for daring to wish to own herself.'[183]

Northern Republicans perceived the institutions of slavery and Mormonism as linked to such an extent that their eradication constituted the two planks of the Republican Party platform in the 1850s, where they were described as the 'twin relics of barbarism.'[184] The anti-Mormon novel Mormon Wives (1856), which attacks slavery, demonstrates this duality:

> The institution of slavery in a free government is a paradox, and gives the lie to the professions the authors of this republic made, else we have shamelessly perverted their gifts…Territory which *they* pledged to be FREE has been overshadowed by the darkness of African servitude – the political influence of such an institution has grown apace with each additional State…and thus has the free government of our fathers become but free in form, to protect a tyranny such as no civilized nation on the face of this earth would tolerate.[185]

However, the author argued that 'repulsive as slavery appears to us, we can but deem polygamy a thing more loathsome and poisonous to social and political purity.'[186] Sarah Richardson also argued that her lot was harder than a slave's; 'I was, literally, a slave; and of all kinds of slavery, that which exists in a convent is the worst.'[187] In the same year, Mormons were accused of buying and selling young Gentile women by New York Times reporters; two young women were sold, they alleged, 'for some groceries.'[188] In 1859 Horace Greeley (who was a prominent opponent of slavery and the 'Slave Power') compared Mormon women to slaves: 'No where else on the Continent of North America are white women to be seen working like slaves, barefooted in the fields. It is

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[183] Platt, The Martyrs, 86.
[184] Kirk H. Power and Donald Bruce Johnson, eds., National Party Platforms, 1840-1956, 27, quoted in Bruce Burget,' On the Mormon Question: Race, Sex, and Polygamy in the 1850s and the 1990s', American Quarterly 57:1 (2005), 77.
[185] Victor, Mormon Wives, v.
[186] Victor, Mormon Wives, vi.
[187] Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 25.
[188] New York Times, May 1, 1858, quoted in Raymond Lee Muncy, Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities: 19th Century America (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1973), 142.

notorious to all here that large numbers of Mormon women are in a state of great want and destitution, and that their husbands do not pretend to provide them even with the necessities of life.'[189]

Such comparisons continued throughout the 1850s and persisted after the Civil War. 1n 1867 Waite described Mormon women in language which recalls portrayals of nuns in convent narratives: 'As religion is their only solace, they try to make it their only object. If it does not elevate their minds, it deadens their susceptibilities, and as they are not permitted to be women, they try to convince themselves that it is God's will they should be *slaves.*'[190] Anti-Catholics and anti-Mormons depicted their opponents as abusing the rights of individuals; unlawfully imprisoning, assaulting and expropriating them, and even murdering them. The reformers had the example of the South before them, where white people could murder slaves, and free blacks, with impunity. Frederick Douglass had written in 1845 that 'killing a slave, or any colored person, in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or by the community.'[191] In The Prophets (1855) by Orvilla Belisle, Brigham Young warns another character of the consequences of non-resistance: ' "Emma," said the Prophet, imperiously laying his hand roughly on her arm, "if you do not silently submit, your life is in danger! Think you, we will allow a paltry woman to thwart a scheme that makes men and women by thousands do us homage, and pours wealth into our coffers, while we are worshipped as superior beings?" ' Bradshaw, author of the novel Brigham Young's Daughter, similarly argued of the lawlessness of the Mormon community and the danger to human life as late as 1870:

> A man dare not say the first word against the Mormon law or belief. If he does, his life is not worth a moment's purchase. There is no redress,

[189] New York Tribune, Jan. 3, 1859, quoted in Muncy, Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities, 143.
[190] Waite, The Mormon Prophet, 187.
[191] Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 68.

> no justice for a Gentile in Utah; for the civil laws even of the United States are administered by officers, every one of whom is a Mormon. A Mormon ruffian, in obedience to a secret order from the rulers of the Church, may deliberately murder a gentile without the least dread of punishment for his crime.[192]

The evils of slavery, for these writers, did not merely reside in physical bondage. Anti-slavery writers did not shy away from the sexual exploitation that was its concomitant; in fact they invoked the dangers slavery posed to female virtue. Theodore Weld wrote in 1839 that 'A planter offered a white man of my acquaintance twenty dollars for every one of his female slaves whom he would get in the family way.'[193]

According to Paul Goodman anti-Masons made similar claims, spreading 'repeated allegations that Masonry gave its members license to assault the virtue of women outside of Masonic protection' in the 1820s.[194] Opponents also accused Mormonism of condoning and even encouraging sexual violence; narratives of Mormon life focused largely on polygamy and its detrimental effects.

Reforming writers were concerned for the state of the nation; they were also worried that the rights of the individual were open to abuse under the various institutions and social conditions that they opposed. This concern, described above, was again a manifestation of long-standing and persistent anxieties regarding the political health of the nation and reformers' fears that it was vulnerable to outside attack. They feared that the nation's institutions would be weakened to such an extent that individual rights could no longer be guaranteed. They used their publications effectively to argue the importance of these rights and to attack their opponents on the basis that they were hostile to the individual's democratic freedoms. That they chose to do so suggests the importance of these rights in the public discourse of the time.

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192 Bradshaw, Brigham Young's Daughter, 23.
193 Weld, American Slavery As It Is, 16.
194 Goodman, Towards a Christian Republic, 6-7.

Reformers feared for the safety of the republic, not merely from external threats, but from a perceived failure of civic virtue among Americans. This was analogous to anti-Catholic fears that Catholics would corrupt American officials. Such beliefs also echoed the concerns of anti-convent writers who reacted with fear and suspicion to the growing phenomenon of native Americans converting to Catholicism.

The republican belief that power was inevitably a force for corruption led to a widespread distrust of public officials. Reformers argued that officials who acted in ways they disagreed with had been 'bought' by various unscrupulous and anti-republican interests. Anti-Masons had been concerned about the alleged proliferation of Freemasons occupying public office in the 1820s and 1830s. T.S. Arthur's temperance novel Ten Nights in a Bar-Room (1854) suggests that such concerns persisted to the 1850s, depicting corrupt officialdom in the character of Judge Lyman, who supports the liquor industry and other corporate interests in exchange for bribes:

> Judge Lyman is always on good terms with the lobby members, and may be found in company with some of them daily. Doubtless, his absence from the House, now, is for the purpose of a special meeting with gentlemen who are ready to pay well for votes in favour of some bill making appropriations of public money for private or corporate benefit.'[195]

Other reforming texts attacked their targets on the grounds that they perpetuated un-American inequalities, which they depicted as reminiscent of aristocratic privilege. The novel Modern Pilgrims (1855) included an anti-communitarian attack on Fourierist Phalansteries, accusing their leaders of expropriating members in order to enrich themselves, comparing their wealth to that of a monastery, and condemning both:

> The treasury of the association had need of converts known to possess large wealth. A Phalanstery and a monastery, though very different in their outward aspect, have many things in common. There is a

[195] Arthur, Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, 199.

> despotism, unacknowledged, but felt, among their victims. The monk relinquishes all his estates to his monastery; the Fourierist takes stock in the Phalanstery. In the Phalanx, as in monasteries and convents, the rich are always deemed desirable converts.[196]

Anti-Catholic writers attacked the Roman hierarchy for enriching its clerics at the expense of individual parishioners and nuns. Sarah Richardson describes the priests of the Grey Nunnery in 1858: 'They have money enough, go when, and where they please, eat the richest food and drink the choicest wines. In short, if sensual enjoyment was the chief end of their existence, I do not know how they could act otherwise.'[197] Mormon leaders were criticized on similar grounds; Bradshaw, for example, condemned Brigham Young in 1870: 'Let us examine one of the valuable estates of this man, and while we do so let us not forget that hundreds of poor people, who had been deluded to emigrate to Utah from Europe by promises of continual work and happiness in the new Zion, are actually starving half the time.'[198]

Vulnerable people are depicted as enduring hardship because of oppression. Douglass had written in 1845 of the privation he suffered while a slave; 'I suffered much from hunger, but much more from the cold.'[199] In 1857 Sarah Richardson wrote that 'the nuns in the Grey Nunnery, or at least those in the kitchen with me, were allowed no food except bread and water, or in case of illness, water gruel.'[200] A later example is that of Mrs. T. Stenhouse, the wife of a Mormon missionary, who wrote in 1875 of the poverty she endured while her husband was away on missions: 'I found that I could not depend upon the Saints to provide me with even the barest necessaries of life…I have gone a fortnight at a time with nothing to eat but dry bread.'[201] The reformers believed

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196 Wood, Modern Pilgrims, I 292-293.
197 Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 53.
198 Bradshaw, Brigham Young's Daughter, 66.
199 Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 71.
200 Richardson, Life in the Grey Nunnery, 50.
201 Stenhouse, 'Tell It All', 105-106

that the forces they opposed were cruel and inhumane, that they were greedy and that they did not care about the physical well-being of those under their care.

Reformers attacked their targets for inhibiting learning and education. They argued that vulnerable people were being denied access to education, and most importantly that they were being denied the opportunity to read and interpret the Bible. The anti-Mormon literature and the convent narratives present similar comparisons between the priest's alleged monopoly of Bible interpretation and the Mormon leaders who, it was claimed, effectively concocted doctrine on the spot. In both cases, writers accused religious leaders of deliberately misleading their followers, as well as assuming an unwarrantable authority over the consciences of their congregations, although the means of doing so might be different. Douglass overheard his owner saying that it would be dangerous for slaves to be educated, inspiring him to associate learning with escape and with rebellion against bondage; he wrote in 1845 'From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom…the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn.'[202] In Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) Eva argues that 'it seems to me, mamma, the Bible is for every one to read themselves. [The slaves] need it a great many times when there is nobody to read it.'[203] According to George Wood, writing in 1855, the Fourierist Phalanstery similarly excluded its members from knowledge and learning. Wood compares it to a monastic institution:

> But, like books in the famous library of the Vatican, they were all under lock and key; and, when they asked for the keys to some of the cases, the librarian said *those* keys were mislaid; and, as for any use made of the books in both libraries, they might have been long ago reduced to ashes. They found that the inmates of this Phalanstery were monks and nuns in

[202] Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 78-79.
[203] Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin, 385.

> many particulars, and in none more entirely than in the confidence they expressed in the infallibility of Charles Fourier and Victor Considerant.[204]

The novel Brigham Young's Daughter (1870) depicts the real Mormon leader Brigham Young telling his daughter, a detractor, "You speak of the Bible! Do you not know that God is constantly vouchsafing to his chosen servants among men new revelations of His Holy will."[205] These authors believed that vulnerable people who could not read, or interpret, the Bible would be unable to improve their lot and achieve the respectability and prosperity that was the basis of a stable democracy. Such accusations were closely related to those made against the Catholic church in the convent narratives.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the sheer number and diversity of reforming narratives and novels published in the United States between 1850 and 1870, as well as the breadth of issues confronted and concerns expressed by them. A combination of factors, which encompassed the social, economic, spiritual and cultural state of the nation, impelled individuals to take action and to come together with others holding similar views to influence their contemporaries and effect the improvement of society.

While each cause had its own characteristics, the reforming movements had much in common, and it is these similarities which are really revealing about the way their participants viewed their society, for they demonstrate a wide-ranging complex of societal anxieties shared by a significant number of religious and cultural leaders. The social and economic changes felt in this period are easily underestimated by twenty-first century historians, but it is clear that there was an enormous sense of dislocation and

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[204] Wood, Modern Pilgrims, I, 288-289.
[205] Bradshaw, Brigham Young's Daughter, 34.

upheaval. Reformers wanted to be active and to take decisive steps to ease these pressures, and there was nothing more natural than for 'anti' movements to emerge, or gain new impetus. These figures associated social problems with the newest and most alien forces in American life, like recent immigration and Mormonism and, in the case of slavery, with an older institution which seemed newly menacing.

Individuals who wrote polemical literature in the reforming tradition used a range of literary forms, styles and structural techniques in order to spread their message effectively. The convent narrative genre is part of this tradition, and the correlations and similarities between convent narratives and other types of reforming literature are extremely numerous, even taking into account individual idiosyncrasies and wide variations in quality and style of writing. Further work into both textual analysis and biographical data needs to be carried out in order to do justice to the great wealth of evidence that these works provide into the interconnections in the reform movement. However, on the evidence so far available, it is clear that the reforming genres supported and reinforced each other and that their consistent approach contributed to the reforming movement's great power.

Reformers chose their causes for a variety of reasons. Even so, this chapter has demonstrated that the impulses and concerns behind these choices had much in common. Most of these writers, it is clear, were not content to comment on only one aspect of American life. They used their writing to address a whole raft of interconnecting issues. In their view, Americans needed to be constantly vigilant in order to defend and preserve their way of life. By 1850, social, economic and political changes were accelerating and the reformers feared that the fabric of the American republic might not be able to contain them – particularly so, as there seemed to be a multitude of hostile forces gathering strength from these often unwelcome

developments. These fears account for the explosion of reforming activity, and they are of the first importance in understanding the convent narrative, which was such a characteristic example of reforming zeal.

As demonstrated above, the narratives of social reform were concerned to preserve and protect the republican values of democracy and liberty that were so important to Americans' self-perception. Every one of these movements, throughout this period, was motivated, in part, by concerns for the American state and its perpetuation as a virtuous republic. Even though the movements were different in many respects, and proposed different cures for the nation's ills, they shared a concern for American political values, suggesting the importance of these values in public discourse as a whole. And their concern was an immediate, pressing one; they argued that the nation was being besieged by un-American forces, intent upon destroying the American political system. The reformers used their narratives to emphasize these dangers in remarkably similar ways.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

A close reading of numerous convent narratives from the 1850s and 1860s has established their central beliefs, ideologies and concerns. This study has argued that these texts reveal a mindset influenced by fear for the safety of the American republic. It has been shown that the authors of these texts were concerned for the safety of the nation and its values, apart from and in addition to their prejudices against Catholicism on religious grounds. The so-called 'paranoid mindset', identified by Richard Hofstadter and David Brion Davis, profoundly affected the people who created these narratives, and is apparent from an analysis of the texts themselves. This study has linked this mindset to other concurrent discourses in this period, including the role of women, the reaction to immigration and economic change and anti-slavery and other campaigning movements. This study has shown that these debates had facets that linked closely to the dominant political philosophies and anxieties of the period.

This is not to suggest that all of the narratives offer an identical perspective, which is far from being the case. They do, however, demonstrate a consistent world view. These texts are evidence that their authors viewed the evolution of the American republic with grave suspicion. They saw menacing forces in every direction, which were associated with the major political, social and economic developments in American life. These authors located these dangerous forces in different places. Some narratives paid more attention than others to particular threats. However, they display a common, and exaggerated, concern for the nation's safety.

The convent narratives of the 1850s and 1860s continually reiterate their belief in, and loyalty to, the republicanism of the Founding Fathers. They invoked the

founders and their beliefs regularly. They used republicanism to justify and bolster their views and opinions. These writers associated Catholicism with anti-republicanism and anti-Americanism. For example, narratives which opposed immigration did so on the grounds that newcomers to America were not educated in its political traditions and would dilute and undermine the institutions of the United States. Such an approach was far from unique and can be found throughout American polemical literature. However, an examination of the ways in which the texts did this enhances our understanding of the forms and uses of didactic literature; of the different causes and campaigns and the ways in which they differed from, and resembled each other; and the ways in which American republicanism had pervaded popular culture.

The texts did not merely promote a republican agenda. They insisted that republicanism was under threat. These authors, as stated above, gave their causes credibility by linking them to the perpetuation of the republic, and by extension, the well-being of the nation. It being easier to make dark threats than to offer constructive solutions to the nation's problems, these writers concentrated on portraying ideas and institutions they disagreed with as anti-republican. While the convent narratives described the ill-treatment of nuns in convents, they were primarily concerned with anti-republican forces. It is obvious that they felt threatened by Catholicism and its growth in the United States. However, this was merely one theme in the convent narrative. Close study of these texts reveals an agenda which attacks various trends and movements, including Catholicism, industrialization, urbanization, Mormonism, slavery and antislavery. The texts also condemn social phenomena like intemperance and vice. These attacks are made on varying grounds, but they have in common a belief that the threat in question is a threat to the welfare of the nation and to the liberties of its people.

These narratives also reveal the preoccupations of their authors. While we know very little about most of these writers, and while much research remains to be done to establish the patterns their lives took, analysis of their works yields a great deal of information about their beliefs, agendas and concerns, going beyond the nativism, republicanism and Protestantism they overtly assert. These works paint a picture of individuals trying to find their places in a rapidly changing society. They stand revealed as seeking self-definition. They used their narratives to align themselves with the ascendant respectable middle-class. But their sense of dislocation from the coalescing social and economic structures is manifested in their suspicious reaction to the forces of modernization. The republicanism of the Revolution, for these writers, was a concept increasingly at odds with the way the nation was developing. The convent narratives clamoured against the threat of invasion and subjugation by the Pope, but they were also profoundly alarmed by ways in which the nation was changing itself from within.

After 1870 writers and publishers continued to create convent narratives, but in smaller numbers. As society changed and modernized the preoccupations of their authors evolved. The 'Catholic menace' took on a new complexion as more immigrants arrived from southern and eastern Europe and negative referencing of Catholicism became associated with stereotypes of the new immigrants, who were even stranger to 'native' Americans than the Irish and Germans had been. The accelerating pace of mechanization and mass production changed the urban landscape beyond recognition. These changes were accompanied by changing emphases within anti-Catholic discourse which were expressed in anti-monastic texts. These later texts are deserving of greater study.

It was noted in Chapter 1 that historians have neglected the convent narratives published in the United States between 1850 and 1870. Where they have received

scholarly attention, this has come from students of literature, and the usefulness of these texts as historical sources has not hitherto been fully recognized. Previous studies have analyzed the notorious works of the 1830s, specifically Rebecca Reed's Six Months in a Convent and Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures of the Hôtel Dieu Nunnery. However, these have been studied in relation to the controversial events that surrounded them rather than as historical sources in their own right. The many narratives that were published in the 1850s and 1860s have received very little scholarly attention, and the insight they can offer into popular attitudes on a range of topics has not been recognized. Further research is clearly needed.

There are several directions in which further study could profitably carried out in this field. Detailed archival study might reveal hitherto-unknown biographical information about these authors. There is also further research to be done on the ways in which the campaigning movements intersected and influenced each other. Additionally, the nativist literature of the post-1870 period is ripe for further study to determine how far ideas of the convent changed or otherwise in the last decades of the nineteenth century and what this could tell us about the United States in this period. Further research in these directions, and others, would help to broaden our knowledge of this period, and these texts, and help to accord them the status, as historical sources, they deserve. Finally, the readers of these texts, and the reception the texts received on publication, have not been discussed in any detail here, but are worthy of detailed study in order to complete the picture of the convent narrative phenomenon.

These documents reveal a mindset which is paranoid, fearful, and obsessed with Roman Catholic wickedness and corruption. The convent narratives are strident in their claims and demands, and single-minded in their attack on convents. However, close reading of these works, and detailed analysis of the attitudes of these writers, exposes

elements which are more ambiguous and questioning. These writers were not wholly sure of their place in American society, and they appear to have felt a degree of alienation and confusion when confronted with the changing realities of American life in the 1850s and 1860s. The convent narratives of this period, though so crude in many ways, encourage, when studied in depth, a more nuanced reading of their creators' lives and attitudes than has been suggested by the past historiography of this subject.

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Many primary sources have been digitized and are available to view online, making them available to more scholars and also preserving fragile texts. In the course of carrying out research for this study, the following websites have been used for viewing primary sources. Only scanned images have been used; no transcriptions have been relied upon. For individual URLs please see the bibliography below. (Most of the URLs have been compacted for the convenience of the reader.)

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